Meditation Lectures

By U Hla Myint

MEDITATION LECTURES

FOR THE BUDDHIST STUDY PROGRAM
ORGANIZED BY ANTIOCH COLLEGE, OHIO, USA

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FOREWORD

The book "Meditation Lectures" is a collection of Dhamma talks given by U Hla Myint at Bodh Gaya, India in 2004 to the American students of the Buddhist Study Program organized by Antioch College in Ohio. It covers general but insightful Buddhism and its meditation practice.

Since Buddhism is a way of life based on morality (sila), concentration (samadhi) and wisdom (pañña), U Hla Myint's lectures followed that order. He began with the five precepts. His explanation was simple but to the point and very easy for the students to see the benefits of keeping the precepts. He then continued with concentration by covering tranquility meditation (samatha). He explained the different ways of practice and their resultant benefits, especially from loving-kindness meditation (metta). For wisdom, he elaborated in simple but precise terms the Four Foundations of Mindfulness (Satipathana). He pointed out that happiness is an evident result of the Buddhist way of life. Finally, he touched on the core subjects such as kamma, rebirth and wrong views. His clear explanation makes the subjects easy for students to grasp, remember, and put into practice. His enthusiastic anwers to students' innocently challenging questions are so impressive.

Realizing the insightfulness of his lectures, Tathagata Meditation Center (TMC) has requested his permission to publish them as the texts for the TMC's yearly Young Adult Retreat. In addition, the book will be distributed free of charge to all people who are interested in Buddhism, especially the meditation practice.

U Hla Myint was born in December 12, 1956 in Tada-U Township, Mandalay County, Upper Burma.

U Hla Myint has had 22 years monastic training, 10 years as a novice and 12 years as a monk. He studied Buddhist scriptures for 12 years (1972 – 1983) in a prestigous Buddhist University called Mahagandayone in the Upper Burma. He has obtained three degrees in the Buddhist texts: Alankara (B.A.), Dhammacariya (Master) and Abhivamsa (Ph.D.).

He took several intensive meditation retreats under the guidance of Mahasi Sayadaw and Panditarama Sayadaw at Mahasi Meditation Center, Yangon, Burma. Later, he became an assistant meditation teacher at the Mahasi Meditation Center, Yangon for four years (1984 – 1988). This monastic training has given him extensive knowing of the Buddha's teaching, and valuable insights into the teaching and practise of meditation.

Since leaving the monkhood in 1989, U Hla Myint has remained a close disciple of the Panditarama Sayadaw as an interpreter and assistant meditation teacher.

PREFACE

The past few years, each September I have conducted a vipassana retreat for American students aged 18 to 22, in Bodh Gaya, India. I was given this fortunate opportunity by my teacher, the Venerable Sayadaw U Pandita-bhivamsa of Burma, a meditation master of worldwide repute. This booklet is a collection of my talks as well as question and answer sessions during the 2004 retreat.

This retreat has been conducted for almost three decades in Bodh Gaya as part of the Buddhist Study Program organized by Dr. Robert Pryor, Antioch College, Ohio, USA, with the advice of Munindrajyi, a highly respected meditation master of India. Every year, the program accepts 32 students from the universities all over the United States, and invites Buddhist teachers of different sects, such as *Theravada*, *Zen, Mahayana*, and *Vajirayana*. In this program, I have participated as the Theravada meditation teacher since the year 2000. For the first three weeks, I teach Theravada Vipassana meditation. Following that, each of the other teachers has three weeks to teach meditation in their respective way.

During the retreat in 2004, I gave one half-hour talk to the students each day. They raised questions immediately after the talk, or the following day. As western students, they often raised questions that interested or shocked me. Once, when I gave a talk on pure love (*metta*), the students asked questions such as: "Without lustful feeling, how can I enjoy romantic love?" "Do you send metta to others for their happiness or your own happiness?" "Isn't it better to help others practically rather than just wishing them to be happy?" Regarding Vipassana, other questions were raised: "By realizing Four Noble Truths, do we remove all meanings from our life?"

"Can meditation make someone crazy?" and so on. Sometimes, they also asked personal questions like: "Is your teacher U Pandita fully enlightened? How about you?"

I often faced questions about my own life. For many years, I lived as a monk with the name U Vannita-bhivamsa. As a monk, I learned and taught Buddhist scriptures for about twenty years and had obtained three degrees in that subject. I also practiced meditation with full faith and energy at the Mahasi center, and spent four years there as an assistant meditation teacher. In the end, I disrobed and married. Regarding this point, the students often raised personal questions such as: "Why did you decide to leave the monastery and get married?" "Didn't your teacher mind?" "Why couldn't meditation prevent you from disrobing?" and so on. Anyway, their questions really make this booklet full of life. I hope readers will benefit from them, too.

I am very fortunate to have such a great opportunity to see American university students practicing Vipassana meditation seriously every September. It is the youth who can be expected to sustain one of the greatest heritages in human history: vipassana meditation, a sure way to ultimate happiness, the heritage passed down from the Buddha.

In conclusion, I would like to express my deepest appreciation to the board of directors of Tathagata Meditation Center, San Jose, USA, that helped to make this booklet possible. Special thanks to Luyen Pham, Rudy Halim, Kenneth Morris & Barbara Janus, Nun Piyabhanini (Megan Cowan), Mr. George Lim and Jesse McClintock who made sure everything goes correctly in this booklet.

May you be well, happy and peaceful.

U Hla Myint

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MORALITY TRAINING

SILA

FIVE PRECEPTS

According to the Buddha's teaching, there are three spiritual trainings: morality, concentration and wisdom.

Regarding morality training, keeping the five precepts is necessary and beneficial for everyone. The five precepts are: refraining from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, telling a lie, and abusing intoxicating drink and drugs.

The first precept is to refrain from killing. Nobody in this universe wants to be killed, and almost everybody is afraid of dying. Is there anyone among you who wants to be killed? If so, please raise your hand. I'm sure nobody does, so killing cannot be justified by any means. Thus, killing is called a universal offence (*loka-vajja*), whereas refraining from it is honored as a great gift (*maha-dana*) or peace gift (*abhaya-dana*).

The second precept is to refrain from stealing. Nobody on earth wants to have his or her property or belongings stolen or destroyed. So, stealing is also counted as a universal offence and refraining from it is honored as a great gift or peace gift.

The third precept is to refrain from sexual misconduct. As you know, nobody in the world wants to be sexually abused, or would want his or her brother or sister to be sexually abused. So, sexual misconduct is also considered a universal offence, and refraining from it is a great gift.

The fourth precept is to refrain from telling a lie. Nobody on earth wants to be told an untruth, or to be cheated or fooled. So, telling a lie is also regarded as a universal offence, and refraining from it is a great gift.

The fifth and final precept is to refrain from intoxicating drink and drugs. It may be difficult to find fault with drink or drugs because it is not directly or immediately harmful to others. However, it can push you to commit misdeeds. It may make polite people rude, smart ones stupid or good people bad. Thus, it can be a driving force behind one to commit misdeeds. For example, when one gets drunk, he may beat his beloved wife or kids, commit murder or rape, and so on. That is why abusing intoxicating drink or drugs is also counted as a universal offence, and refraining from it is also said to be great gift.

There are hundreds of precepts to observe for monks and nuns. Most of them, however, are constitutional offences (*pannatti-vajja*), not universal offences (*loka-vajja*). For example, having one's dinner, enjoying music, etc., can be harmful to nobody, but they form an offence for monks and nuns because of the constitutional laws laid down by the Buddha. So, your morality training can be said to be complete if you are able to fulfill these five-precepts. If all human beings in the world could fulfill them, this world would be much nicer for all of us to live in.

How many of you can be expected to fulfill this five-precepts. Please raise your hand. [Much to my delight, all the students raised their hands.]

Five Precepts
Questions and Answers

Q: Regarding the fifth precept and its evil results: These are major offenses that most people can't imagine themselves committing. Can you add smaller examples that typical people can relate to. i.e. drinking weakens one's inhibitions leading to frivolous speech/gossip, resulting in inadvertently hurting someone or saying something that one regrets. Drinking and drugs cause oneself harm even if you don't notice immediately - drinks and drugs cloud and dull the mind, making one lazy and unmotivated to do wholesome/kind actions.

A: The comment itself can serve as a good answer to it.

Q: Regarding the constitution laid down by the Buddha: Can you comment on the purpose of the constitution lay down by the Buddha. i.e. rules to support the lifestyle of contemplation and the attainment of supramundane happiness rather than the pursuit of mundane happiness.

A: Each monastic rule and regulation has a particular purpose on the basis of a background story. For example, a monk is not allowed to have food after the noon hour. The background of the story is as follows: one rainy night a monk went to a village for alms. Because of rain and darkness, he mistakenly went to a backyard where the housewife saw him by the lightning and yelled in panic "ghost, ghost!" Thus, the Buddha laid down this rule not to have dinner because of such inconveniences.

Another example: monks are supposed to spend a three-month rains retreat in a single monastery without going anywhere overnight unless he has an allowable reason.

This rule was laid down by the Buddha just in accordance with people of those days, who believed that green grass and crops were a sort of living things, and monks trampled them to death by traveling during the rainy season. That is why monks are supposed to take a rains retreat for three months.

Moreover, there are ten general purposes that concern every rule and regulation. They are as follows: to promote the sangha's welfare, to promote the sangha's convenience, to punish bad monks, to honor good monks, to overcome a present predicament, to avoid future predicaments, to arouse new devotion, to increase present devotion, to prolong the Sasana, to reinforce monastic rules and regulations.

Q: Can it be called 'killing' if we take antibiotics in order to kill bacteria or germs?

A: There are five factors necessary for an act of killing: the intention to kill, the effort made to kill, eligible being, knowledge that you are killing a being, and finally resulting in its death. In the case of antibiotic consumption, there is a shortage of some factors. First of all, you may not really have the intention to kill a being, or the germs themselves cannot meet the requirements necessary to be considered a living being. Anyway, I am quite sure if you take medicine as medicine with the intention to cure a disease, there will not be any moral offence committed.

Q: What about a so called 'white lie'? Is that a moral offence?

A: In the case of kamma, what matters most is intention. If your intention is good and your action hurts nobody, then it cannot be said to be 'an evil deed'.

Q: Are beer and wine allowable from the aspect of the fifth precept?

A: This precept says, "Refraining from *sura* and *meraya* that make one drunk and mad". Here, *sura* literally means 'alcoholic drink', and *meraya* is fermented drink like beer and wine. However, the loophole is the phrase 'that make one drunk and mad'. If certain amount of alcoholic drink or certain kinds of beer or wine do not make you drunk and mad, I don't think it unwholesome in terms of 'universal offence'. According to monastic rule and regulation, however, a monk or nun cannot even take a drop of such drink. Even then, alcohol in food or medicine is still allowable to monks and nuns unless it has any alcoholic effect. In any case, it would be better if you could just avoid all alcohol because you may inadvertently exceed your limit.

Q: I have had love affairs with many women; did I break the third precept?

A: The third precept is actually defined as 'harming another with one's sexual energy.' If you have legal sex without harming anyone, I don't think it can be moral offence in terms of the third precept, no matter how many women with whom you have been. King Suddhodana, the Buddha's father and King Bimbisara both were noble disciples of the Buddha, yet they had many queens in addition to hundreds of royal maids as their consorts.*

Q: How does the Buddha perceive music in the context of the fourth precept?

A: The fourth precept is to refrain from telling lies, slandering or gossiping. It has nothing to do with listening to music. Once, a deva called Panca-sikha entertained the Buddha with his music. The Buddha even expressed his appreciation of it. However, if you observe the Eight precepts, then you would not be allowed to enjoy music, because it is said to be considered 'a thorn to concentration'

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* Regarding having hundreds of royal maids: In the context of ancient India, this was acceptable. However, today, some people may be troubled by this. At least two questions may arise for readers: Was it fair that a woman could be one of many consorts and men were free to collect as many women as they pleased? Does this story give people permission to be promiscuous without considering how it effects others? Does sex have to be illegal or violent to be considered "misconduct."?

These are good questions and here are some answers to them:

(1) It was kings who had many wives but not normal people. In history, some queens also had many legal husbands and royal boys. Nowadays too, it is legally acceptable for a boy to have many girlfriends, and for a girl to have many boyfriends. The point is not to harm anybody with one's sexual energy. According to the Pali texts, however, even though a girl willingly accepts a boy, it is an offence for a boy if a girl is under age 18, legal dependent of her mother (matu-rakkhita), father (pitu-rakkhita), brother (bhatu-rakkhita) or a type of society like dhamma friends (dhamma-rakkhita).

(2) Whether being promiscuous is morally allowable or not, one is liable to be so, if conditions are favorable. Actually, regret about an offence is often more harmful than the offence itself. That is why sometimes, being well-informed of the precepts helps overcome such regret. Of course, rape and adultery cannot be justified by any means.

Eating Meat & Killing Animals

Q: One day, ants came into my house for water and it was very difficult not to kill them. My room-mates think I'm crazy because I will eat meat but not kill a smaller being, much smaller than a cow. I can't argue against their ideas. Now, it seems very difficult for me also. Before, I was clear, but now I'm confused. For monks the question is easier I think. They don't have to buy their food and they don't choose it. They just eat whatever is put before them, but for me when I go to the store I can choose. Doubt is very unpleasant. What are your wise words on the subject?

A: How we eat is more important than what we eat. Being a vegetarian can be called wholesome only when it involves kindness and sympathy to animals. Otherwise, it can be unwholesome, if you eat it greedily and covetously, or with evil purposes, for example, to be respected by the people, (hypocrisy, *satheyy* in pali) or to follow traditional way without any other reason (ignorance, *moha*) or to keep your body beautiful (selfishness, *lobha*) and so on. In the same way, eating meat is unwholesome if it involves unwholesome mind-set like selfishness, hatred and ignorance. On the other hand, it can be wholesome if you eat it with mindfulness, or with wholesome purposes, for example, some hermits in old day ate meat left over by wild animals like tigers or lions with the purpose just to survive and practice for noble liberation.

According to the Buddha's teaching, the degree of merit or demerit is determined by the degree of evil or good mental state that is involved in an activity. So, there can be big difference in terms of evil degree between killing an ant and killing a cow. However, when you eat beef, you don't kill a cow, but you simply eat food, which involves no unwholesome mindset such as selfishness (*lobha*), hatred or anger (*dosa*) and delusion (moha) and so on. Just eating meat cannot be said to be evil, at all. Moreover, we are using leather material in our daily life, like leather shoes, leather bag and so on. Worse than that is silk material, which is produced from thousands of particular kind of bugs. As a jewel, we use pearl which is produced at the expense of certain type of oysters. The worst is that we are driving, killing hundreds of small animals like insects or bugs. However, there is no sin simply because there is no unwholesome mindset involved.

It is too good to be realistic that all livestock are safe if all of us are vegetarian. Just being vegetarian, however, cannot prevent us from killing each other let alone animals. You know, there are vegetarian groups that are involved in terrorism and war.

Buddhism is realistic, but not idealistic. Whether an action is wholesome or unwholesome depends on whether the mind-set involved is good or bad. For example, if you give hundred dollars to somebody with intention to make him happy, it is wholesome deed because it involves unselfishness (alobha), kindness (adosa) and wisdom (amoha). When you pay tax the same amount of money to the government, you may may even feel upset about it. Then it cannot be said wholesome although it is the same as the other in terms of giving one hundred bucks.

So, no matter whether you are vegetarian or not, any activity is evil if it involves evil mind-set such as selfishness, jealousy, anger, conceit, hatred, delusion and so on; it is wholesome if it involves noble mind-set such as unselfishness, kindness, wisdom, sympathy and so on.

CONCENTRATION TRAINING
SAMATHA

ANAPANA

For the concentration training, there are fourty kinds of concentration practices (*samatha*) mentioned in the Pali texts. Out of these I would like to teach you contemplation on the in-and-out breath (*Anapana*). *Anapana* is the most well-known of the Samatha practices because the Buddha himself practiced it until he attained the highest level of concentration (the fourth *jhana*). With this deep level of concentration as a base, he continued with vipassana meditation until he became fully enlightened. A descendant of the original Bodhi tree where he sat is close to where we are sitting.

The procedure is as follows:

1. Sit with your legs crossed
2. Keep upper part of your body straight (but not too rigid)
3. Put the palm of one hand face up, resting on the other hand and place them on your lap. This is sitting style that is highly recommended in the texts for development of concentration. Actually, any sitting style is allowable as long as you can sit without moving for a long period.
4. Close your eyes, (There is no such instruction in the texts, but it helps to prevent diverting your attention to visible objects. However, if you think it better to keep your eyes open, it's up to you.)
5. Breath in and out regularly and naturally, neither too softly nor too vigorously;
6. Focus your mind on the nostrils, or at the point of the upper lip immediately below where the current of air can be felt;

7. Note it 'in' when the air comes in, and 'out' when the air goes out. (Here, noting or labeling is helpful to concentration, but if you can do without it, it's up to you.)

All you need to do here is to focus your mind on the nostrils or the upper lip for as long as possible. Your attention should not leave this 'focusing point' from where the breath can be easily felt and observed. This will help speed the development of concentration. The longer your mind can be focused on this meditative object, the stronger concentration becomes. Developing concentration is your only concern in the practice of *samatha.*

How to Solve Problems

In the beginning of the practice, you will often find that your mind wanders away. When you notice this is happening, make sure you immediately draw it right back to your "focusing point". Try your best to concentrate on this single object without thought intervals. Another common problem for beginners is unpleasant sensations such as pain, itchiness or numbness. If this occurs try to ignore it with patience and perseverance and without changing your posture. If you change your posture often, it means you give up too easily and your mind will not be able to gain the strength necessary to develop concentration.

So, you should try your best to focus your mind on the main object without moving too often, or changing your posture. Whereas in vipassana we observe many objects, in samatha we focus on only one object wihtout paying attention to any other object. If the pain becomes unbearable, you may change the posture, but keep your mind stay with the main object constantly. Of course, it is not an easy job to keep your mind on a single object for a long time, but it helps here to remember the saying: "Practice makes perfect."

Benefits of Concentration:

Thus, in due course of time, you will be able to concentrate on the object for longer and longer periods. Eventually, your mind will become stable, peaceful and sharp. Enhanced intuitive power, even psychic powers, can result from this practice.

Concentration is also very important in our daily life. Without concentration, your mind cannot be stable enough to understand what the teacher is teaching in the class room. You may not even remember what you have had for your breakfast this morning. With the help of concentration, your mind becomes stable and sharp. With good concentration, you can write a good essay, professional article or profound thesis. So, it should be obvious that the development of concentration is very important for a successful life.

FOUR JHANAS

(Four Stages of Concentration)

When we observe the in-and-out breath, we find that our mind can be tortured by several kinds of thoughts known as mental hindrances. There are five kinds mentioned in the texts: thoughts of sensual pleasure, thought of aversion, thoughts of laziness, thoughts of worry and anxiety, and thoughts of skeptical doubt.

Kamacchanda

We are rarely satisfied with what we have, and are always wanting something better or different. For example, we often think about having a better house, a better car, better times with a beautiful partner on a spectacular beach, in a night club or a disco. These types of thought quite often torture our minds and interfere with meditation practice.

Byapada

If we hate someone like an enemy or rival, then we are likely to think about how to remove or defeat him or her. These are thoughts of aversion. For example, when somebody insults or treats us badly, we get angry with him. During meditation, we are very likely to think about arguing or fighting with him or her. Thus, these types of thoughts torture our minds from time to time, and ultimately hinder our practice.

Thina-middha

Sometimes, we become simply too lazy to practice meditation and may even give lame excuses for not practicing. For example, "I should stop practicing, or I should start later because it is too cold, or too hot; too early or too late; I'm too hungry or too full, and so on". So laziness also becomes a type of mental torture or hindrance to the practice.

Uddhacca-kukucca

The fourth mental torture is wandering thoughts or restlessness of mind (*uddhacca*), and regret or worry (*kukucca*). We human beings rarely live in the present moment. For example, even if we sit in a fine chair in a nice house at present, we are likely to think about something else in the future or past, connected with our bank account, home loan, social affairs and so on. Thus, our mind wanders away and becomes restless, and we feel regret or worry. One time a business woman came and practiced at the Mahasi Center in Burma. She said she could not concentrate because she could not stop thinking about trading cooking oil from Southern Burma to Northern Burma. Thus, our mind can be tortured by wandering thoughts and worry.

Vicikiccha

The final type of thought that acts as a hindrance to practice is that of skeptical doubt, or a lack of confidence. We often have doubts about whether meditation is beneficial or not; whether the way we practice is correct or not; whether the teacher is reliable or not; whether we can succeed in the practice or not, and so on. Thus, our practice is constantly interfered with these kinds of doubtful thoughts.

Three Nimittas: By paying close attention to in-and-out breath, and keeping our mind away from these thoughts or mental hindrances, we will come to experience three stages of the meditative object as follows:

1. '*parikamma-nimitta*' (workable form of the object): in the case of anapana, in-and-out breath is workable form of meditation to focus on.
2. '*uggaha-nimitta*' (visualized form of the object): When concentration gets mature, the object becomes

so vivid that it can be mentally perceived without opening eyes.

3. *'patibhaga-nimitta'* (identical form of the object). In due course of time, with the stronger concentration we will find the object transforming from its actual form into somewhat like three-dimension image. For example, we may find the in-and-out breath as if it were green light or a cord or stick that is going in and out the nostril.

The First Jhana

If we can pay full attention to that transformed identical form of in-and-out breath with the mind completely focused on it, our concentration becomes well established to a certain extent, along with rapture (*piti*) and happiness (*sukha*). This stage is regarded as the first Jhana, which consists of five mental factors: initial attention (*vitakka*), sustained attention (*vicara*), rapture (*piti*) and happiness (*sukha*) and concentration (*ekaggata*).

The Second Jhana

At the second stage, concentration is so strong that the mind can spontaneously focus on the object without making an effort, that is, without paying initial attention (*vitakka*) and sustained attention (*vicara*) to the object. Only rapture (piti) and happiness (sukha) are experienced since as in the First Jhana, there are no mental hindrances present. Thus, the Second Stage of concentration or the Second Jhana consists of three mental factors: *piti, sukha* and *ekaggata*.

How *Piti-Sukha* Takes Place

Mental defilements and *piti-sukha* are diametrically opposed like light and dark. For example, when you are angry, there cannot be happiness in your heart. In the same way, when you feel jealous of your successful rival, or when you have sexual desire, happiness cannot be there. Also, when there are no mental hindrances, there is real happiness. When there are mental hindrances, there is no real happiness. So, because of concentration you are able to protect your mind from the mental hindrances allowing rapture (*piti*) and happiness (*sukha*) to naturally take place.

The Third Jhana

At the third stage, the concentration is much stronger and more mature than in the previous Jhana's. It no longer needs to be supported by *vitakka* and *vicara*. Moreover, it is accompanied only by subtle happiness not with rapture as before. Thus, the third stage of concentration, or the third jhana consists of only two factors: *sukha* and *ekaggata*.

The Fourth Jhana

At the fourth and highest stage, the concentration is so mature that it does not need to be supported by *vitakka* and *vicara*, and is no longer accompanied even by *piti* and *sukha*. At this stage, there is only tranquility. Thus, this highest level of concentration or the fourth jhana consists of only two factors: tranquility (*upekkha*) and concentration (*ekaggata*). The mind is so pure that it can develop intuitive power, will-power and psychic powers.

Note: Concentration can be developed until the fourth stage by contemplating not only on the breath, but also on many other objects such as earth, fire (i.e. candle light), water (i.e. a glass full of crystal clear water), and on colors such as blue, yellow, red, white, or space and so on. The point is that we can develop concentration up to certain level by focusing our mind on a single object for extended periods. Keep in mind that *samatha* practice takes single object that is conceptual and unchanging. Whereas vipassana takes whatever mental and physical phenomena present themselves as its meditation object. The practice is to directly experience all mental and physical phenomena as they change from moment to moment.

Anapana
Questions and Answers

Q: For what purpose does one develop concentration?

A: A restless mind is unstable and powerless, whereas a concentrated mind is stable and powerful. So the purpose here is to develop a stable and powerful mind.

Q: How important is it in our daily life?

A: Without concentration, you cannot learn anything. Concentration is the foundation for all your knowledge. So, the stronger your concentration, the sharper your knowledge. That is why the Buddha said "Those with concentration can know anything properly." So, just imagine how important the concentration is in your life.

Q: I could not focus my mind on the nostrils; my mind was wandering a lot. Am I supposed to observe the wandering mind?

A: It is a common problem for every beginner who tries to focus their mind on a single object, since they have never done this before. Don't become discouraged. If others can do this, you should be able to do it. Regarding the wandering mind, in Samatha practice, you must focus on a single object, and not change objects. When you find your mind wandering, simply draw it back to the meditative object. That's all you need to do in Samatha practice. Observing the wandering mind is in Vipassana practice.

To help in the case of so many wandering thoughts, you may practice by mentally counting the breaths. That is recommended in the Commentaries. When doing this, you should not do less than five breaths or go beyond ten, or make any break in the series. By stopping short of five breaths, your mind does not have enough room for concentration, and by counting beyond ten your mind takes the number rather than the breaths for its object. Thus, any break in the series would upset the meditation.

When counting, you should make the first count when the in-breath or the out-breath is completed, not when it begins. So taking in-breath first, you count mentally 'one', when that in-breath is complete, you then count 'two', when the out-breath is complete, 'count three' and so on up to ten. Then begin again from one to ten, and so continue in that manner. If you take both the in-breath and out-breath as 'one', it is better to count only up to five.

Q: I tried my best to focus on the nostrils, but my mind was going in or out beyond the nostrils. Is it ok if I follow the breath through without staying on the nostrils?

A: In the case of Samatha, your mind must be fixed on the "focusing point" without changing locations to allow concentration to gain strength.

Q: When I do *Anapana* practice, my mind becomes cloudy and lazy. Is this because of tiredness or lack of practice?

A: These are common problem for beginners. Don't worry, later you will be able to manage it better. If others can do it, you can do it, right?

METTA - LOVING KINDNESS

Today I would like to talk about metta practice which is one of forty kinds of concentration practices (samatha). [Students laughed.] Don't worry; I won't teach you all 40. Before teaching it, I would like to explain the definition of the word 'metta' which generally means 'love.' There are three kinds of love mentioned in the Pali Buddhist texts: *Tanha-pema*, a lustful type of love that can be found between husband and wife, or girlfriend and boyfriend; *Gehasita-pema*, the type of love found between family members; and *metta-pema*, love that is unconditional (*appamanna*), unselfish, and totally pure.

Lustful Love

The first kind of love, the lust of *tanha -pema*, is not pure because it is defiled with selfishness or attachment. Recall Henry the Eighth, the king of England over five hundred years ago, who killed one of his beloved queens when he found out that she had been unfaithful to him. His action makes clear that his love for the queen was not pure, as it was connected with selfishness or attachment.

Usually, we love spouses, girlfriends or boyfriends and wish them happiness only under certain conditions: when they are helpful to us, faithful to us or attractive to us. Thus, this type of love cannot be called pure and unconditional (*appamanna*) because it can disappear any time if conditions change, (i.e. if they are no longer helpful or no longer faithful to us). Of course, there can be times pure love or metta develops between a husband and wife, or girlfriend and boyfriend. Imagine how much more pleasant and peaceful our lives would be if we can minimize selfishness or attachment, and arouse pure love toward our spouses, or partners.

Family Love

The second kind of love, *gehasita-pema*, is relatively pure compared to *tanha-pema* because it is less polluted with selfishness or lustful feeling. We have parents, children, brothers, sisters, uncles, aunties, nieces, nephews, and so on. Among them, a parent's love for us is said to be the most durable and strongest. Parents can love their children so much that they can even sacrifice their lives for them. Our parents, however, expect loving care from us in return and often make demands for our presence. In this case, their love is more or less associated with attachment. Moreover, parents' love can vary between children. Naturally, they would love a well-behaved and successful child more than a naughty one.

We even find parents (although relatively few) who desert or disown their child when they find the child too naughty or too troublesome to take care of. These parents cannot love a child who brings them trouble instead of pleasure. In this case, their love is still associated with selfishness, so it cannot be called one hundred percent pure. Still, this family kind of love can still be said to be much purer than lustful love because it can include less selfishness and more loving-kindness.

The difference

Here, let me relate one of my own experiences. One day, I saw a good-looking girl coming from a distance. Seeing her, I felt the lustful feelings that people often consider to be love. The girl came closer and I suddenly realized that she was my sister. At that point, the lustful feeling immediately turned into the family type of love. At that moment, I experienced the difference between these two kinds of love in my own mind. The strong attachment in the first type burnt my heart while the second was associated with less attachment and left me with more peace in my heart. That is why the Buddha once advised Venerable Ananda to arouse family love toward the opposite sex in order to prevent lustful feelings from arising: "Ananda, when a monk sees a woman of his sister's age, he should think of her as his sister; a woman of his mother's age as his mother, and so on".

Pure Love

The third kind of love, *metta-pema*, is pure and free from attachment or selfishness. With this type of emotion, we can love someone and wish him or her happiness unconditionally, regardless of whether the recipient is helpful, harmful, young or old, black or white, Asian or American. Only then, can it be called *metta*, pure or unconditional love. Here, we can take the Buddha who loved equally his only son Rahula and his enemy Deva-datta as an example. He loved everyone equally, and wished everyone happiness equally, regardless of whether an individual was harmful or helpful to him. This kind of love is therefore called unlimited or unconditional, *appamanna*. Imagine how much more peaceful and pleasant this world would be for all of us to live in if we could cultivate this metta towards one another instead of selfish love.

Benefits of Metta

Metta is something that can be developed. By cultivating it, we enjoy eleven kinds of benefits: sound sleep; pleasant waking; the love of all beings; protection of spirit beings (devas); freedom from dangers such as fire, flood, poison, and so on; tranquility of mind; beautiful appearance; peaceful death; attainment of meditative absorption (jhana); and heavenly rebirth.

To Protect Oneself From Dangers

The Buddha himself often applied metta in his daily life to protect himself from physical dangers or to win over another's heart. Once, he was attacked by a drunken elephant named Nalagiri. Immediately, he sent metta to the animal, wishing it happiness with a phrase like: "May this animal be happy and healthy." The beast was so touched by his metta that he bowed down at his feet with adoration. This is an example of how the Buddha applied metta for his protection.

To Win Somebody's Heart

We can also practice metta to be loved by others or in other words to win somebody else's heart. The Buddha himself applied metta for this purpose. Once the Buddha went to Varanasi to teach the first sermon to a group of five ascetics who were old companions of his. Initially, they made an agreement among themselves not to respectfully welcome the Buddha because they thought he had abandoned his ascetic life and followed a path of self-indulgence. So, the Buddha sent metta to them to win their hearts. As a result they disregarded their agreement and warmly welcomed him. Most importantly, they paid proper attention to the sermon until they became enlightened.

To Win Prince Roja

Another time, the Buddha took a missionary tour to the Kusinarama province, where he was warmly welcome by all the Malla princes and princesses. Ven. Ananda saw among the crowd one of his close friends, prince Roja. Ven. Ananda happily said: "Roja, I'm really happy that the Buddha is being warmly welcomed by all of you."

"Yes, Sir," the prince replied, "the Buddha is very welcome. But, I am here just because I don't want to pay a fine. We have made an agreement that whoever fails to see the Buddha must pay a fine of R 500."

This upset Ananda and he reported this incident to the

Buddha. On hearing the situation, the Buddha concentrated his metta toward the prince alone. Just as a light that is concentrated becomes a powerful spotlight, so also the Buddha's universal metta — when it was concentrated on a single person — became so powerful that it caused the prince to rush back into the monastery to look for the Buddha. Upon seeing the Buddha, he paid deep respects and apologized for his mistake. After this, he became a devoted disciple of the Buddha. This is how the Buddha applied metta in order to win people's hearts.

So, whose love or favor do you wish to win? Try applying metta to fulfill your wish. However, do not forget what metta is: unselfish and unconditional love. If you can develop true metta towards a person, surely, you will win his or her heart. So, we Buddhists traditionally send metta, for example, to our boss when we need a favor or to the interviewer when we are going to have a job interview, or to the people and devas in a place where we are going visit. In these cases, we seem to be applying metta for our own good. Although our initial purpose may be for our own good, however, there can be moments we can successfully develop true metta to that person or deva. So, we can surely enjoy its benefits.

Without Training

There is a funny story connected with applying metta for protection. A monk, going across the paddy fields, was chased by a water buffalo. Upon seeing the buffalo, the monk sent metta to it: "May the buffalo be happy and healthy." But the buffalo kept chasing him. It was only when the monk's attendant threw a stone at it did the buffalo stop chasing them. The monk then made the remark: "Oh dear, your stone is much more powerful than my metta." Without proper training in metta, we cannot apply it instantly. If, for example we try to ride a bike without training, we will surely fall down, no matter how simple it appears to be. In the same way, it requires proper training in metta practice in order to apply it effectively in our daily life.

According to Metta-sutta, the following is the way to send metta to living beings

There are beings frightened or not frightened. May they be well and happy.

There are beings I have seen or have never seen. May they be well and happy.

There are beings living near or far. May they be well and happy.

There are beings having more rebirths or no more rebirth. May they be well and happy.

There are beings tall, short or medium. May they be well and happy.

There are beings big, small or medium. May they be well and happy.

There are beings fat, thin or medium. May they be well and happy.

Furthermore, the commentary suggests for us to begin metta practice by sending metta first to oneself. A phrase like "May I be well and happy," is used in order to arouse feelings of sympathy which in turn makes it easier to generate metta to others. It also suggests visualizing someone as happy and healthy when we send metta to him or her, so that our metta can be even more effective.

Metta
Questions and Answers

Q: You said, samatha practice always takes a single object. In the case of metta samatha, why does it take so many living beings as its object?

A: Good question! I will talk about that tomorrow

Q: Do you send metta to others for their happiness or your own happiness? Can others become well and happy due to your metta?

A: Yes, he or she can receive it, and enjoy its benefits. There are many stories in Pali scriptures that show metta reaching the recipient. Once, a monk called Visakho took a four-month rains retreat to practice metta on a mountain called Cittalo. At the end of the retreat, when he was about to leave, he heard someone crying nearby. He asked who was crying and why. “Sir, I’m Manikho, a guardian spirit in this rose apple tree,” he answered, “I’m crying because you are about to leave this place and go elsewhere. Before your stay here, we spirits used to be hostile to each other. But, for the last four months while you were here, we’ve had peace and harmony. If you leave here, hostility will surely resume among us.” On his request, the monk extended his stay one more year. Each time he planned to leave, the spirit requested that he stay. The monk ended up staying there until his death. This story gives one illustration of how metta can be far reaching and beneficial to the individuals it is sent to.

The texts also mention that although a mother turtle never returns to her eggs after she lays them, if she was killed, all the eggs turn rotten. Likewise if all the eggs are destroyed, she dies of a broken heart. It is nothing but metta that communicates between them.

Moreover, in a scientific article I read, it is said that one lover can mentally communicate with the other. In this study, it was found that the lovers could receive twenty to eighty percent of the message from their partners. Such discoveries suggest that the person we send metta to can indeed receive our metta. So, we can conclude that the benefits from the metta can accrue not only to the sender but also to the receiver.

Q: Without lustful feeling, how can I enjoy romantic love?

A: Don't worry. It is impossible to get rid of romantic feelings before the attainment of the third stage of enlightenment. Metta love is the attitude of wishing another to be happy and healthy without any expectations for one's own sake. Because of this, it is much more pure, durable and peaceful than lustful or romantic love. Don't worry. I'm sure you won't lose your romantic life at all. Actually, your romantic life can even become nicer because of the metta.

Q: How can one distinguish between compassion and sorrow/sadness/empathy?

A: Compassion is optimistically thinking of how to help someone to get out of trouble, whereas sorrow or sadness is pessimistic thinking; just worry without considering how to help. Empathy is kind of compassion along with understanding of someone else's feeling.

METTA FOR JHANA

Two Kinds of Metta

Metta practice is of two types: general metta (*Anodhisa Metta*) and individual metta (*Odhisa Metta*). Yesterday, I explained the first one and how to send metta generally to all living beings. Practicing metta is honored by the Buddha as a special kind of merit that is much greater than ordinary merit like giving to charity (dana). Once, the Buddha said: "Monks, it is much greater to develop metta even as shortly as someone squeezes a cow's teat for milk than to feed a thousand people three meals a day for years." By practicing general metta, however, you cannot obtain jhana because ones concentration cannot become strong enough due to the broad focus on many beings. Metta practice produces a special merit and results in enjoying eleven kinds of benefits (as mentioned yesterday) whether if it is general or individually directed.

Metta for Jhana

Today I would like to talk about how to practice the individual metta for the attainment of jhana which is a very high degree of concentration. According to *samatha* practice, we need to stay focused on a single object for as long as possible. So, instead of sending metta to many or all living beings in general, we must send metta to an individual person until we reach to certain level of concentration. In this regards, it is very important to select the right person as an object of metta. If we select the wrong person as a metta object, we will encounter one of two problems, anger or lust.

Near Enemy of Metta

If we send metta to the one we extremely love, especially to one of the opposite sex, we are more likely to arouse lust instead of true metta. Here, the commentary mentions Prince

Bodhi as an example. One day, prince Bodhi wanted to try individual metta and he decided to spend the whole night practicing. He told his princess to go to bed alone, so the princess locked the door and slept while the prince stayed outside practicing metta.

First he practiced general metta wishing all beings well and happy. Later, he practiced the individual metta, starting with his beloved princess, since he thought that individual metta should begin with someone he dearly loved. After some time, he happened to arouse lustful feelings instead of metta. Here, the commentary says that he got up and knocked at the door to wake up the princess. However, since he did not succeed in waking the princess, he beat the door harder and louder. But this too was in vain. Here, the commentary says "*bhittiyuttamakasi*" (fighting against the wall). He did fight against the wall of the room. That's all the commentary says. I don't know how the story ends up. [student laughter] This story illustrates that we should not send metta to an individual person of the opposite sex because it may arouse lust instead of pure love or metta. This lustful love is called the immediate enemy of metta.

Far Enemy of Metta

If we send metta to the person we dislike, we are likely to arouse anger instead of metta. Last month, a friend of mine called me from Canada. He related one of his stories on the phone. He tried to apply for US visa because he needed to leave the country in order to apply for permanent residency in accordance with Canadian immigration law. He went into the embassy along with three friends including an attorney. But according to a new regulation, the American consular now only allow one client in at a time. The consular yelled at him and told his friends to get out right away. He then rejected his application and gave him another appointment for the next week. Therefore, I kindly suggested him to send metta to the consular so that he could win her heart. Do you know what he said then? "No, never! Whenever I tried to send metta, I just imagined killing that bloody fool consular." [Here, all the students made exclamation, "Oh!"] That is why we should not start our metta with the one we hate because it is difficult to arouse metta for such person.

The Person to Start Metta with

So, it is very important to select a right person for an object of metta. The Pali texts say, there are four kinds of persons not to begin metta practice with: someone we hate, someone we have extreme love for, someone we neither hate nor love, and our enemy. Therefore, the commentary recommends us to start metta with someone of the same sex whom we highly respect, like one's father for boys or mother for girls. Here, we have to select someone we have in common. So, the boys you should select Robert, the director of Ohio University, who has organized this program for almost thirty years, as a metta object, because we love him, but not extremely so, and we have respect for him also. According to the commentary's advice, we may also visualize him with a happy smile among his beard. Ok? All the men, let us begin doing metta by saying "May Robert be well and happy." Say it ten times, please. [they all laughed initially, but then followed the request.] For the women, Dianniar (the wife of Robert) would be the best object. So, please say, "May Dianniar be well and happy" for ten times.

How to Attain Jhana

If we can pay full attention to that very person for a long while and keep our mind completely focused on it, then, the concentration will develop. Rapture (*piti*), and happiness (*sukha*) take place naturally, as the concentrated mind protects against the mental hindrances. Thus, the first stage of concentration or the first Jhana is comprised of five factors such as: initial attention (*vitakka*), sustained attention (*vicara*), rapture (*piti*), happiness (*sukha*) and concentration (*ekaggata*). How to attain the higher levels of Jhanas can be known by following what was discussed about Anapana practice.

No Highest Jhana:

With metta samatha you can reach up to the third jhana, but not to the fourth (the highest jhana). This is because metta naturally associates with happiness rather than tranquility (which is the main characteristic of the fourth Jhana.). This is why you cannot expect to enjoy psychic or supernatural powers, which normally develop at the level of the fourth jhana.

Note: According to the commentary, we can continue metta with various kinds of people in sequence: someone we love dearly such as friends, and then someone we neither love nor hate, and finally our enemies.

Metta For Jhana
Question and Answers

Q: You said we should not send metta to the opposite sex lest it arouses lust instead of pure love. How about gays who have lust for their same sex?

A: It is unusual to have lust for one's same sex. Anyway, the point is not to send metta to anybody if it arouses lustful feeling.

Q: Isn't it better to help others practically rather than just wishing them to be happy?

A: Most of the time, our mental attitude leads our actions. If we have a metta attitude, surely we will be helpful in a practical way to others.

Q: I had a hard time visualizing someone being happy. Is it necessary to do so?

A: No, it's not. If visualization is difficult, you can simply wish him or her happiness. It is just like a prayer for somebody else's happiness.

Q: How important is metta in our daily life?

A: Without metta, you cannot enjoy a happy life. Just imagine how happy you would be if you could eat something, or go somewhere with someone you love. Thanks to metta, you can lead a successful life enjoying the eleven benefits from it.

Q: I love my grandfather so much. Is it impossible to send him metta just because he is a different sex?

A: Of course, it is possible. If you develop metta for the attainment of jhana, however, you need to send metta to a single person for a long time, maybe, months or years until you attain jhana. In this case, someone of the same sex is safer. Anyway, sending metta to a different sex for a short time, should not be problem.

Q: When I develop metta, I feel so sorry for those who are very poor, like the Indian people here that tears run down my cheeks. What is your advice?

A: When you send metta to people, you should pay attention to the happy aspects of their lives, which is said to be the approximate cause of metta (*padatthana*) in the Pali texts, not to the negative aspects. Please try it again. Don't give up easily.

Q: I have been taught that one should start metta with oneself. Am I supposed to do so?

A: By sending metta to oneself, one can arouse empathy that facilitate metta toward others. Except that, however, one cannot attain jhana or any other merit by doing so. You can do that if you want, of course.

CONTEMPLATION ON ONE'S DEATH

I would like to talk about one more concentration practice known as contemplation on one's death. Actually, I'm hesitant to teach you this because you may be too young for this type of practice. However, I have a few reasons to present it to you: first, I want you to have a general idea or better understanding of the samatha concentration practice; second, Pali texts honor it as one of the four guardian meditations; and thirdly, I expect that, more or less, you will be able to gain some of its benefits..

A True Fact

Death is a true fact in our lives. Whether or not we forget about it, or don't even want to hear about it, one day we will inevitably have to encounter it. Death is unavoidable. That is why the Buddha said: "Nobody can escape from death even if they may hide themselves in the sky, in the ocean, or in a cave of a mountain." Nobody can escape from it. Death is a true fact of life.

Unknown Five

Regarding our death, the Buddha said there are five factors about which we cannot know: what age we are going to die, of what disease, what date and time, which place and which life after death we will have.

1. Age

We don't know at what age we are going to die. Now, I am in my late forties. Many of my friends died at different ages. During primary school, one of my friends drown in a lake; a classmate of mine who was very beautiful died in her teenage years. There are people who die in their mother's womb; some a few days or months after birth and so on. So we really don't know at what age we are going to die.

2. Disease

We don't know what disease we will die from. Nowadays, there is an increasing number of new and deadly diseases, cancer and AIDS. Moreover, many people die as the result of disasters like floods, fire, storms and earthquakes. Some die in various types of accidents. We don't know how we will die or what disease we will die from.

3. Time

In the world, every minute and every second people are dying. We do not know the date, day, season, or what hour we are going to die. We cannot know when it's our turn to die.

4. Place

We don't know which place or which part of the world we are going to die. Nowadays, many people die in a foreign country, something that they would never have imagined. You were born in America, but you cannot be sure you are going to die in your home country. Sometimes people die in a foreign country, but are buried in their homeland. Actually, the Buddha once said: "There is no place in the world where we haven't died before throughout the Samsara (the cycle of life)." We do not know where we will die, or where our funeral will be in this present life.

5. Life After Death:

We cannot predict which life we will have after our death. There are some people who are reborn as human beings and can recall their past lives. It is acceptable that we have present lives. This can mean that we should have past and future lives also.

Research On Rebirth

Honestly, I don't think it will be difficult for you to believe in life after death. I would like to relate some scientific research on this subject made by Dr. Robert and his partners about forty years ago. In their findings, they mentioned Burmese twin girls living in southern Burma who were believed to have been two British soldiers during World War II. They died somewhere near Yangon when their plane was shot down, and were reborn as twin girls in a nearby village. They both could correctly recall their past lives. One interesting thing they both claimed is that they were soldiers in their past life, and reborn as women because they were thinking of their wives all the time when they were away from home.

A Ghost I Once Met

Believe it or not, I once encountered a ghost. It was around 1964, (before you were born). I cannot imagine where you were then, do you know? When my parents divorced, my father moved to a small village on the bank of a river called Pan Laung that was about four miles away from my school. On a cloudy winter evening, on the way back home from school, I saw a giant ghost in the river standing by the bridge. The ghost was so big that the bridge reached up only to his waist. So, he must have been approximately two hundred feet tall. Except for his gigantic size, he looked totally like a human being wearing an army uniform. Even today his two big pockets are still vivid to me. He did nothing to me, but just looked down at me. I was so scared that I stood frozen in my tracks until he disappeared when a train came across the bridge.

When I told my father about this incident, he related the following story. He once had a close friend called Hla Thaung whom he trained to become a good hair stylist. Hla Thaung was a railway gate-keeper and stayed at the head of the bridge.

One day, he tried to save a girl who was drowning in the river. The girl was saved, but unfortunately, he drowned. This was in the same river where I saw the ghost. On that very day, before his mother was informed of his death, she saw him together with three women coming into the house and disappearing after a while. Three days later, he possessed somebody and explained how he died, and how happy he was with three new girlfriends. It is amazing, ghosts also have girlfriends. (laugh). Believe it or not, but it is a true story that proves there is a life after death.

Purposes

Although these five factors are unknown to us, we are surely going to die one day, no matter how educated or wealthy we are. There is nobody who will not die. All the people in the world today will surely die within one hundred years. If no more people were born, this world would be empty of living beings within one hundred years. By reflecting on our death (a true fact of life) we can become a better and wiser person. It can change our way of thinking or our mental attitude. Here, let's take the German dictator, Hitler, as an example. If he had recollected his death, he would not have killed millions of Jewish people because he would have realized that everything would become meaningless to him when he died. Thus, meditating on death can make us better and wiser. So, let's practice it as follows:

> "*I don't know how I will die;*
> *At which age, at which place,*
> *On which date, from which disease,*
> *And which life I will have after my death.*
> *My death is certain*
> *My life is uncertain;*
> *I can die anytime, anywhere.*"

Say the second passage three times. When you seriously practice this meditation, however, you should say it as long as possible contemplating on how certain your death is.

No Jhana Attainment

By practicing this meditation on one's death, one cannot attain any levels of jhana, but only what is known as neighborhood concentration. This is because the meditative object is not obvious or clear enough for jhana development. However, this practice is very helpful to reduce mental defilements such as greed, anger, hatred, arrogance and so on.

Now, I hope you understand what samatha means and what its purpose is.

Recollection Of Death Questions and Answers

Q: What does Buddhism say regarding the argument that one can be attached to something or somebody, while at the same time appreciating the inevitable impermanence of that thing or death of that person?

A: Let me answer your question from my own experience. When I was a monk, I practiced this meditation on one's death seriously for years in order to protect my mind from mental defilements, especially from sexual desire. It did work to some extent, and I was able to enjoy its benefits. Later, however, I fell in love with a girl and disrobed. Now, she is my wife. [Students laughed]. Just like a drug addict, even though I know the inevitability of my death, I could not overcome the sexual urge. According to Buddhist scriptures, even after you have achieved the first and second stages of enlightenment, you are still liable to get married because your wisdom is not strong enough to fight sexual desire. Anyway, I find this meditation works well to some extent, for reducing stress and worry, or in other words, for keeping my mind calm and peaceful.

Q: Is it enough to recognize one's death, or is there a truth beyond this to be realized.

A: Very good question! The truth beyond this to be realized is *Nibbana,* which is reverse side of mind and body like light and dark. You need to practice vipassana to be able to appreciate it.

Q: As we recognize our death, our suffering may decrease, but does this also reduce our happiness, thereby leading us to a neutral existence rather than happiness?

A: There are two kinds of happiness: the happiness of sense pleasure (*kama-sukha*) and pure happiness (*viveka-sukha*). The second one is much superior to the first because it results from lack of mental defilements such as greed, sexual desire, anger, hatred, jealousy, pride, worry, anxiety, laziness, boredom, delusion and so on. Just imagine how horrible it feels, when you get angry or worried or jealous or sexually active or bored and so on. Imagine how calm and peaceful you would feel with no mental defilements. So, you will find real happiness when you can reduce defilements by recollecting your death.

Q: How does the recollection of one's death help reduce mental defilements?

A: If you carefully view someone who is dead, you will find that everything he or she was concerned about in this world is now meaningless. In similar way you can also find this truth in your own life if you practice the meditation on death. Then, you won't find anything or anybody to be attached to, or to be angry with, or to be proud of. Thus, mental defilments such as craving, anger, hatred, jealousy, etc., are reduced.

WISDOM TRAINING

VIPASSANA

VIPASSANA

For the entire last week, we studied *samatha* concentration practice from both the theoretical and practical aspects. I would like to express my appreciation for your whole-hearted participation. Now, I would like to teach you *vipassana* or wisdom training. I hope you will participate with the same amount of enthusiasm you showed in learning samatha practice.

What Vipassana Means

Vipassana is combined of two words, *vi* (prefix) and *passana* (noun). *Vi* means extraordinary, and *passana* means seeing. So, *vipassana* means extraordinary seeing. For example, to see water is ordinary seeing, whereas to see the molecules of H2O would be extraordinary seeing. In the same way, to see a person is ordinary seeing while to see mental and physical phenomena instead of a person is extraordinary seeing.

What Vipassana Practice Is

Our teacher, Sayadaw U Pandita often defines vipassana practice as self-research. When you do research on monkeys, for example, you need to watch them for the whole day or night, for weeks, months or even years. You must note what they eat, how they eat, how much they eat, how often they eat, how they sleep, how long they sleep, how often they sleep, how they make love, what are their emotions, what is their social life, and so on. Only then can you gain a complete knowledge of the monkeys.

In the same way, when we do vipassana self-research, we need to watch ourselves day and night, noting whatever physical activities we do: going, standing, sitting, lying, washing our hands, reaching for something, opening or closing the window and so on (*kaya-nupassana*). We also must note whatever sensations we feel and whether they are pleasant, unpleasant or neutral (*vedana-nupassana*). Also, to be noted is whatever mental activities we have such as thinking, planning, imagining, daydreaming, analyzing, reasoning (*citta-nupassana*); and in addition, whatever senses are obvious such as seeing, hearing, and so on (*dhamma-nupassana*).

To Find The Real You

Nowadays, a lot of scientific research has been done on human beings from many aspects such as the physical, mental, emotional and psychological aspects. Scientifically, we know a great deal about ourselves, such as digestion system, blood circulation system, metabolism and so on. So, what knowledge can we gain about ourselves from doing vipassana self-research?

Suppose, for example, you have learnt almost everything you can about India from books, video tapes, movies, or 'Google'. I have been staying in the USA for the last few months and thanks to a friend of mine there, I know how to use 'Google'. So, I am now a modern meditation teacher, right?[students laughed] No matter how much information about India you have learnt from Google, a few days visit to India can exceed or outdo all those other ways of obtaining the information. Do you know why? The India you have learnt from books or 'Google' is not the real India. What you are directly and currently experiencing is the real India; real Indian soil, real Indian air, real Indian smell, real Indian taste. In the same way, what you have learned about yourselves from thousands of scientific studies or 'from Google' is not "real you." You can only find the 'real you' from vipassana self-research. Now, let's start practicing vipassana.

Vipassana Procedure (from 1 to 5 are the same as in samatha practice):

1. Sit with the legs crossed.
2. Keep upper part of the body straight (but not too much).
3. Put one hand face up on the other and place them on your lap. (This is customary sitting style that is highly recommended in the texts for the development of concentration. Actually, any sitting style is allowable.)
4. Close your eyes, (There is no such instruction in the texts, but it helps to exclude diverting attention to visible objects. If you think, however, it is better to keep your eyes open, that's ok too.)
5. Breath in and out naturally, neither too softly nor too vigorously
6. Focus your mind on your abdomen without letting your mind go elsewhere;
7. When the abdomen rises, note it as "rising", and as "falling" when it falls. (Here, noting or labeling is helpful to concentration).
8. When you find your mind wandering, don't just draw it back to the main object, but closely and carefully make a note such as "thinking, thinking". This is known as awareness of thought or mind (*citta-nupassana)*. When the thought disappears, return immediately to the main object of noting "rising" and "falling" of the abdomen.
9. When you feel unpleasant sensations like pain, aching, itchiness, numbness, and so on, note them as they are. This is known as awareness of sensation called *vedana-*

nupassana. When the pain disappears, return immediately to the main object. If the pain persists for very long you can either ignore it and go back to the main object or keep on noting it as long as it remains obvious. If the pain becomes unbearable, you may change your posture. However, when you change your posture, don't forget to do it slowly and mindfully, noting every movement involved in the changing process.

10. If any one of the senses becomes obvious to you, such as seeing, hearing, smelling and so on, you should note it as it is. This is known as general awareness called *dhammanupassana*. Afterwards, when the sensation disappears, return immediately to the main object.

Moment-to-moment Objects:

Your mind needs to stay with the main object as long as possible so that concentration can develop. Vipassana, however, takes note of present objects that keep on changing moment to moment. That is why you are not supposed to note only the rising and falling, but also any other new object that you become aware of. Even though we note the single object of rising and falling, the phenomena we need to be aware of are constantly changing from moment to moment.

For example, you can be aware of tension or pressure one moment, release the next moment; warm one moment, cool the next moment; vigorous vibration one moment, and soft the next moment, and so on. As a matter of fact, seeing changes in phenomena means seeing their impermanence. In order to develop strong concentration (which is essential for insight), you need to try and stay with home object, i.e., rising and falling as long as possible.

When Walking

When walking, note the steps and whether they are taken with right or the left foot. You must be aware of all the successive movements involved, from the lifting of the foot to the dropping of it.

When you walk fast or walk for some distance, it is sufficient to note each step taken: “left step” “right step”.

When walking slowly or doing the cankama walk (walking up and down), three movements should be noted in each step: when the foot is raised, when it is pushed forward, and when it is dropped. Begin with noting the rising and dropping movements. You must be properly aware of the raising of the foot. Similarly, when the foot is dropped, you should be properly aware of the ‘heavy’ falling sensation of the foot. You should walk slowly, noting ‘rising and dropping’ with each step.

This noting will become easier after about two days. Then go on to noting the three movements described above, as “lifting” , “moving”, and “placing.” In the beginning, it will suffice to note one or two movements only, thus “right step”, “left step” when walking fast, and ‘raising, dropping’ when walking slowly. If, when walking thus, you want to sit down, note “wanting to sit down”, “wanting to sit down.” When actually sitting down, focus your noting on the heavy sensation as your body lowers.

Note: The object of practical vipassana (*paccakkha-vipassana*) must be the mental and physical phenomena that are present and internal. For example, you cannot directly experience somebody else’s pain, or any phenomena that is in the past or future. Inferential Vipassana (*anumana-vipassana*), however, can take any phenomena as its object whether past or future, internal or external, near or far, and so on. This vipassana insight may spontaneously take place following the practical vipassana.

Vipassana
Questions and Answers

Q: When noting experiences in vipassana, should one try to identify what one is experiencing, such as a sound or just note 'hearing'?

A: You can note either the sound or just hearing. However, you must put emphasis on the internal object. So, you should note (know) 'hearing' rather than the sound. For more precise awareness it is helpful to identify what you are really experiencing.

Q: I find that it is easier for me to practice Vipassana after I have first spent a while practicing samatha in order to develop a basic level of tranquility and peace within myself. Is this method ok?

A: That is ok. Samatha is the practice that is directly supportive to vipassana. It is called '*samatha-nuggahita*'.

Q: What is the proper relationship between concentration and awareness training?

A: They are supportive of each other. A certain amount of concentration is necessary for insight knowledge to develop.

Q: What is the practical difference between samatha and vipassana?

A: Vipassana takes multiple objects of *paramattha*, (i.e., mind and body that are present and internal). Its purpose is to attain insight knowledge and enlightenment. Samatha takes a single object that is *pannatti* (conceptual). Its purpose is to develop concentration until reaching the jhana level.

Q: Being a former dancer I tend not to breathe from my abdomen so it is strenuous to try. Is there another object I could focus on?

A: You can note ‘sitting and touching’.

Q: Is a certain level of concentration necessary for Vipassana to be effective?

A: Yes, at the very least, momentary concentration is necessary. That is why you need to stay focused on a home object as long as possible.

Q: How should I be mindful when having a conversation?

A: Just note speaking as “speaking,” whenever you remember to and do it as much as possible.

Q: How can I deal with sleepiness?

A: Here is some advice given by the Buddha to Ven. Moggalana who became sleepy during his practice: open your eyes and look at the light; massage your limbs; pull on your ears; wash your face; stand up and walk. If after you have tried all these you are still sleepy, then mindfully go to bed.

Q: I often have feelings of restlessness thinking, “what time is it” and “when will this be over?” How do I cope with these kinds of feelings during sitting?

A: It may be because you are not interested enough in meditation. Like any other type of research, Vipassana requires time, energy and a desire for the best results. You should make a firm determination to try your best to focus your mind on meditative objects for the best results.

THE AWARENESS OF BODY

As I mentioned yesterday, we are doing research on ourselves from four aspects: the bodily aspect (*kaya-nupassana*), sensational aspect (*vedana-nupassana*), mental aspect (*citta-nupassana*) and the general aspect (*dhamma-nupassana*). So, today, I would like to explain about vipassana practice from the bodily aspect. In the Satipatthana Sutta, the Buddha talked about the mindfulness of body in six sections:

1. Mindfulness of breathing (Anapana)
2. Mindfulness of bodily posture
3. Mindfulness of clear comprehension
4. Reflection on the repulsiveness of the body
5. Reflection on the material elements
6. And nine cemetery contemplations.

The commentaries such as Patisambhida-magga and Visuddhi-magga unanimously say that among these six, only 2, 3 and 5 are counted as vipassana, and the remaining three are considered samatha (the development of concentration). Regarding the numbers 2, 3 and 5, the Buddha expounded on how to practice as follows:

(2) "Monks, a monk knows when he is going 'I am going'; he knows when he is standing 'I am standing'; he knows when he is sitting 'I am sitting'; he knows when he is lying down 'I am lying down; or just as his body is disposed so he knows it".

(3) "And further monks, a monk in going forward and back, applies clear comprehension; in looking straight on and looking away, he applies clear comprehension; in bending and

in stretching, he applies clear comprehension; in wearing robes and carrying the bowl, he applies clear comprehension; in eating, drinking, chewing and tasting , he applies clear comprehension, and so on."

(5) "And further, monks, a monk reflects on this very body, however it be placed or disposed, by way of the material elements: 'There are in this body the element of earth, the element of water, the element of fire, the element of wind."

What to Observe

According to the above-mentioned passages, we are instructed to observe all kinds of bodily behaviors or actions such as going, standing, sitting, reclining, looking straight or sideways, bending or stretching our limbs, changing our clothes, eating, drinking, chewing, savoring, even our physical behaviors in the restroom. However, before our concentration becomes strong enough, if we try to note all the various objects occurring to us from moment to moment, it will only cause our mind to become restless.

Therefore, it is important to have a home object to focus our mind on. Mahasi Sayadaw taught us to observe the rising and falling of the abdomen as a home object when sitting, and the steps of our foot when walking. So, we should keep our focus on the rising and falling of the abdomen for as long as possible. If any other object interferes with it, like a wandering thought or hearing a sound, we should simply note them as they are, and then immediately return to noting the home object.

When walking, it is generally suggested to note 'right step, left step,' for the first twenty minutes, lifting dropping for the second twenty, and 'lifting, pushing, dropping,' for the last twenty. This is how we need to observe for the continuous awareness of the physical body.

Why to Use the Rising and Falling Instead of the In and Out Breath

Here, a question may be raised: Why is the rising and falling observed instead of the in and out breath if both are actually bodily actions? According to Pali texts (Patisambhida-magga and Visuddhi-magga commentaries), the observation of the breath, *Anapana* is not counted as awareness of bodily actions (*vipassana*), but only a concentration practice (*samatha*). That is why Mahasi Sayadaw when teaching pure vipassana, instructed meditators to observe the rising and falling instead of the in and out breath. He said, however, that if we observe the warm or cool sensation of the breath, it can be counted as the awareness of sensation, *vedana-nupassna*, or awareness of the wind element, *kaya-nupassna*. In any case rising and falling is a bodily action that is always present and obvious enough for observation. So, he taught us to observe it as a home object although there are possibilities of other home objects.

What to Experience:

Although we are supposed to observe the rising and falling of the abdomen or lifting and dropping of the foot, what we can really experience is not the rising and falling or lifting and dropping, but the various bodily elements involved in those actions (especially three fundamental elements such as earth, fire and wind). For example, when you observe the rising and falling: one moment you may experience hardness or softness, heaviness or lightness, (which characterizes the earth element), and the next moment you may experience coolness or warmth (fire element), and next, pressure, tension, tightness (wind element).

Later, you will be able to differentiate these physical phenomena from mental states. Thus, the first insight takes place, known as *nama-rupa-pariccheda-nana,* the knowledge that distinguishes between mind and body.

It Can Lead To Full Enlightenment

By practicing just *kaya-nupassana*, we can become fully enlightened like Venerable Ananda. Ven. Ananda was trying strenuously to attain *arahantship* overnight on the eve of the first Buddhist Council. Throughout the whole night, he was practicing a form of vipassana meditation known as *kayagatasati.* His practice consisted of: noting his steps, right and left, raising, pushing forward and dropping of the feet; noting, happening by happening, the mental desire to walk and the physical movement involved in the walking. Although this went on till it was nearly dawn, he had not yet succeeded in attaining arahantship. Ven. Ananda realized that he had practiced the walking meditation to excess and that, in order to balance concentration and effort, he should practice meditation in the lying posture for a while. He entered his chamber, sat on the couch and then began to lay himself down. While doing so he noted 'lying, lying,' and in an instant, attained arahantship.

Venerable Ananda was only a sotapanna (one who has attained the first stage on the path to Nibbana) before he laid down. As he began to lie down he continued to meditate and reached sakadagami (one who has attained the second stage on the path.), then anagami (one who has attained the third stage) and finally arahantship (the noble one who has attained the last stage on the path). Reaching these three successive stages of the higher path took only a short while. Just consider this example of Ven. Ananda's attainment of arahantship. Such an attainment can come at any moment and need not take long. Moreover, it can be noted from this example that we can be fully enlightened by observing just the body.

The Awareness Of Body
Questions and Answers

Q: Should there be distinct separation in walking meditation between “lifting/placing” and “left/right”?

A: No, not really. You are instructed, however, to note left/right initially because your concentration is not strong enough yet to note many objects in detail. Later, however, when your concentration gets stronger enough to note walking in more detail, you can note it in two parts “lifting/ placing,” or three parts “lifting, moving, placing.” Actually, you can even observe more detailed parts of the whole process depending on how strong your concentration is.

Q: When I am meditating and observing my abdomen, do I need to say “rising, falling” in my head, or can I just observe?

A: Saying doesn’t matter. What matters most to be aware of it as it is. Initially, however, making a mental note is helpful for precise and accurate knowledge of an object.

Q: Is the walking meditation aimed more at developing concentration or awareness?

A: It is for both concentration and awareness. However, any insight or knowledge requires certain degree of concentration. So, you should focus on the main object rather than random ones.

Q: Is it just as effective to focus on the breath as on the abdomen?

A: As a matter of fact, both can serve the same purpose, that is, to develop concentration and insight knowledge.

Q: When walking, is it better to walk naturally or deliberately? Should I place my feet flatly on the ground or begin with the heel and move on to the toes?

A: Rather naturally, but it is necessary to slow down so that the concentration and awareness can catch up with the object. That is why the commentaries advise us to behave as if we were invalid, deaf, blind and dull persons doing everything slowly and mindfully during intensive retreats.

Q: Is it okay to just note "right, left" during walking meditation because when I think "lifting, moving, dropping", I tend to focus less?

A: In the beginning, your concentration is not strong enough to note many objects in more detail. Later, when it gets strong, you can note more objects or in more detail.

Q: How should walking meditation be done? How should thoughts be treated?

A: Just walk normally and pay attention to your foot. Try to experience what sensations are arising and passing away in it. Regarding thoughts, you should keep on noting (unless it interferes with your concentration) because your foot's movement is normally more obvious than any other object.

AWARENESS OF SENSATION

Yesterday, I explained about the awareness of the body. So, today I would like to explain about the awareness of sensation. In this regard, the Buddha expounded how to practice as follows:

"Herein, monks: a monk when experiencing a pleasant feeling knows, 'I experience a pleasant feeling'; when experiencing a painful feeling, he knows, 'I experience painful feeling'; when experiencing a neither-pleasant-nor-unpleasant feeling, he knows, "I experiences neither-pleasant-nor-unpleasant."

Sensation Moment to moment

As mentioned above, there are three kinds of sensations to observe: pleasant (*sukha*), unpleasant (*dukkha*) and neutral (*upekkha*). One or more of these are occurring from moment to moment. One moment we experience a pleasant sensation, next moment an unpleasant or neutral sensation, and so on. Walking, for example, makes us feel pleasant after a long sitting, but is unpleasant after some time. Sitting makes us feel pleasant after a long walking, but is also unpleasant after some time. Perhaps, reclining can be said to be the most relaxing posture, but if we lie down on our bed for too long, stiffness and pain will arise. We cannot remain lying on a single side for very long without becoming uncomfortable, so from time to time we have to change sides.

In the same way, we need to change our clothing and location according to the changes of weather and temperature. For example, we need to wear thick clothing or stay in heated rooms when it is cold, and wear lighter clothing or stay in an air-conditioned room when it is hot. Thus, we are constantly struggling to replace unpleasant sensations with pleasant ones. Without mindfulness, we rarely notice these changes in our sensations.

Dukkha

Unpleasant sensations (*dukkha*) are the most obvious and a common problem for every one at the beginning of meditation practice. As a matter of fact, it is a good meditative object to help develop the awareness of sensation. Meditators, however, often take it as an obstacle, and often complain about it. Moreover, they try to get rid of them instead of making an attempt to be mindful of them. Actually, we are noting unpleasant sensations not to get rid of them, but to be aware of their true nature, function and how they arise and pass away.

Upekkha

Regarding neutral feeling (*upekka*), it can be experienced any time you pay attention to it, although it is not as obvious as the other two (pleasant and unpleasant). According to Vipassana formula, however, we should always observe the most obvious object. (*yatha-pakatam vipassana-bhinives* - depending on how obvious an object is, vipassana takes place). So Mahasi Sayadaw instructed meditators to observe *Sukha* (pleasant) and *Dukkha* (unpleasant) rather than *Upekkha* (neutral feeling). We can experience this neutral feeling in any part of the body if the attention is focused on it. There is a highly respected meditation master who instructed his meditators to practice vipassana by paying attention to the whole body from head to toe, and from toe to head. I believe they experience this neutral feeling.

Until Full Enlightenment

In any case, by observing just the sensations of *sukha,* *dukkha* or *upekkha*, we can become fully enlightened. The following story in the commentary illustrates this point.

Once, about 60 monks were doing an intensive retreat in the deep forest. One night, one of them was taken by a tiger while practicing. All the rest of the monks tried their best to save him. However, the tiger took him onto a mountain cliff where nobody could follow. All they could do at this point, was to remind him to practice mindfulness. "Sir, it is time for you," they reminded him to take refuge in the Dhamma, "do vipassana meditation practice and nothing else."

As severe as it was, he managed to observe the pain and noted it "pain, pain, pain, pain." In this way, he noted it over and over. If pain can be noted with full energy like this, we can discover that it is not *our* pain but just an impersonal sensation. At that point, our experience of pain can change greatly. Moreover, we can see it changing from moment to moment, increasing, decreasing, moving to other parts of the body, disappearing or reappearing and so on. Thus, awareness of sensation is developed. It was in this way that the monk successfully observed pain until he became fully enlightened only a few moments before his death. From this story it should be noted that by observing sensations alone we can become fully enlightened.

All We Need To Do With Sensations

In conclusion, I would like to tell you about all we need to do with our sensations. Every beginning meditator always encounters several kinds of upleasant sensations such as stiffness, ache, numbness, itchness, prickliness, soreness, heat, and so on. All we need to do is to note them. If you feel itchy, for example, note it as "itchy, itchy"; if numb, note it as "numb, numb"; if you feel pain, note it as "pain, pain" and so on. Normally, you should keep on noting them with patience and persistence until them disappear. When they disappear, you should go right back to the home object.

You may often find, however, that the more you note, the more pain you feel. Don't worry. It is just because you pay more attention to them, and your awareness of them becomes clearer. If they become unbearable, however, you can change your posture slowly and mindfully, i.e., noting all mental and physical actions involved in the changing process, starting from the intention to change the posture. After changing, you may feel comfortable. This is a pleasant sensation called sukha to be noted as it is. Right afterword, you should go back to the home object, noting rising and falling of the abdomen. In due course of time, with the stronger concentration and mindufIness, the unpleasant sensations will become less and less. You may even sit for two to three hour comfortably without any pain.

The Awareness Of Sensation
Questions and Answers

Q: There was a pain throughout my legs and buttocks, but when I thought of my girlfriend, the pain disappeared. When I noted it, however, it became even more severe. Why and how should I deal with it?

A: Yes, the more attention you pay to the pain the more severe it may feel. With less attention the pain can appear less severe. Don't forget, we are noting pain to be aware of its true nature, not to get rid of it. To develop awareness of sensations you should note each one as it is, with patience and persistence

Q: Vipassana meditation recommends that one should note pain rather than reacting to it. If pain is the body's means of indicating a threat, then noting does not make the cause disappear, and the body might be harmed. For example, if something hot touches my hand, noting does not make the cause go away and my hand is burned. Does this mean that one should allow the body to be harmed in favor of the development of concentration?

A: I think you go too far, or are over concerned about the pain. Anyway, it is not reasonable to take an unnecessary risk by letting your hand burn. However, you need to pay a price for what you want. So, it makes sense to give worthless things away in exchange for the priceless ones. No matter how wisely you take care of your body, it will surely decay as time goes by and will be destroyed in the end. That is why there are many heroic meditators now and in the past, who sacrifice their lives or limbs for enlightenment. You know the saying, "No pain, no gain," right?

Q: Should one immediately let go of a sensation or let it naturally fall away?

A: Don't forget we are noting sensations to be aware of their true nature, neither to let them go, nor let them fall away. All you need to do is simply be aware of sensations as they are.

Q: What sensations am I looking for during walking meditation?

A: In vipassana meditation, we are looking for nothing. We are trying to be aware of what is really happening in us. Just feel your foot; be aware of what sensation is happening from moment to moment. "Fortunate people see what is there rather than what they are looking for."

Q: What should one do with painful sensations that always seem to interfere with the practice?

A Just be aware of them as they are. That is really all you need to do. Insights will take place naturally in due course of time. " Pain is your friend."

AWARENESS OF THOUGHTS

Yesterday, I talked about the awareness of sensation (*vedana-nupassana*). So, today I will explain about the awareness of mind or thoughts.

The Buddha said in the Satipatthana Sutta:

Herein, monks, a monk knows…

the mind with lust as with lust; without lust as without lust;

the mind with hate as with hate; without hate as without hate;

the mind with delusion as with delusion; without delusion as without delusion;

the mind in a shrunken state as in a shrunken state;

the mind in a distracted state as in a distracted state;

the mind in a developed state as in a developed state;

the mind in an undeveloped state as in an undeveloped state; and so on.

Thoughts But No Thinkers

According to the above-mentioned Pali text, all we need to do with mind and thoughts is to be aware of them as they really are. We often identify our minds and thoughts with something or someone. Actually, there are only thoughts not thinkers. Thoughts arise depending on our sense organs, sense-objects and attentiveness. They pass away immediately after arising. Thoughts can be compared to a continuous succession of new electrical impulses that light up a lamp. If we practice meditation, we will realize how often thoughts arise and pass away within only a few moments.

Wandering Thoughts

Often, we are thinking about the past and future, and rarely focusing on the present moment. So, we miss the chance to experience what is really happening. Old people tend to think of their golden days in the past, while young people are planning for and thinking about their future. Here, I would like to tell you a story from the Reader's Digest to illustrate how old people waste their time thinking of the past.

Thinking of the past:

Once, a patient with injury on his head came to a clinic.

"What is wrong with your head?" the doctor asks.

"It was about 25 years ago, sir" replied the patient.

"No," the doctor said, "I'm asking about the injury on your head."

"Oh yes," the patient said, "I'm explaining about that."

"Ok, ok," said the doctor, "go ahead, then".

He continued thus: "25 years ago I worked for a farmer who had a beautiful daughter. One evening, she visited me and kindly asked, 'Are you bored with our farm?'"

"I replied 'No, I'm not. I'm happy here.' "

"She continued, 'Are you lonely?' "

"'No, I'm ok; I'm not lonely.' "

Then she asked me again ' are you sure you are not lonely?'

" 'Oh yes, sure.' I replied. After a while, she left."

At this point, the doctor impatiently interfered,

"No Sir, I'm asking what happened to your head."

"Of course, I am explaining about that," he said and continued his story, "This morning I was on the roof of my house fixing the leak. Recollecting that event, realizing what she meant and how stupid I was then, I fell down from the roof, and got this injury on my head."

Thinking of the future:

Regarding young people, let me tell you a story from Dhammapada. A teenage novice was waiting upon a senior monk at the lunch table. The senior monk was his uncle and the novice was fanning him with a palm fan. Meanwhile, he was thinking about disrobing and marrying his girlfriend. He planned how to make money and how to enjoy their marriage and how to nurture their child. Then, he imagined he would take his wife and kid in a small cart to visit his uncle at the monastery. On the way, he would say that he would carry the kid; his wife would tell him to drive the cart and not to bother about the kid. He would insist and grab the kid from her. Between them the kid would drop on the cart-track and the wheel would pass over the kid. He would get so furious with his wife that he would strike her with the goading-stick. Thereupon, he absent-mindedly struck the head of the senior monk with a fan. How crazy our mind is!

Thus, we rarely live in the present moment; we rarely perceive the present phenomena which really exist and can be directly experienced. Rather, we waste our time thinking about the past and future not unlike the novice and the patient.

Purposes

There are practical reasons to observe thoughts. First of all, it is to realize their true nature and how quickly they arise and pass away from moment to moment. We can also reduce thought interference and gain strong concentration and awareness of mind. This awareness of mind or thoughts (*citta-nupassana*) is very helpful in our daily life.

We can keep our mind calm and peaceful by observing our thoughts. For example, if we are mindful of our thoughts or emotions while driving, we will not have an accident. Nor would we cut our finger while cooking in the kitchen. Thus, the awareness of thought is very beneficial in our daily lives in addition to its main benefit of insight knowledge.

Up to Full Enlightenment

More importantly, by observing our minds or mental states, we can become fully enlightened. During the Buddha's time, there were many monks, nuns and lay people who were fully enlightened by observing the mental states of happiness or rapture which resulted from listening to Dhamma talks or from samatha meditation.

All We Need to Do with Thoughts

Anyway, all we need to do with thoughts is to be aware of them as soon as possible. It is very important to note thoughts before going back to the home object, so that we can realize their true nature, causality and impermanence. So, if we find our mind wandering, note it as "wandering"; if daydreaming, note it as "daydreaming"; if planning, note it as "planning"; if analyzing, note it as "analyzing"; if judging, note it as "judging"; if angry, note it as "angry"; if jealous, note it as "jealous"; if anxious, note it as "anxious"; if worried, note it as "worried"; if emotional, note it as "emotional", and so on. Normally thoughts disappear if noted carefully. Right afterward, we must go back to the home object, i.e., noting rising and falling of the abdomen. Naturally, thoughts will come over and over again. Don't worry about that; just note them over and over again. Remember that this awareness of thought can lead you to the enlightenment.

The Awareness Of Thoughts
Questions and Answers

Q: If there is no thinker behind our thoughts, how can we control our thoughts and cultivate mindfulness?

A: That is right there is no thinker, but the thinking process is changing from moment to moment. Like a computer program that can find and fix its error by itself, the thought process that is accompanied by wisdom can find and fix its error by itself. For textual explanation, we have a sort of sub-consciousness that is accompanied by inborn wisdom (*ti-hetuaka-bhavanga*), which can be developed by feeding information to it (*paripak-indriya*), and by keeping it away from mental defilements (*kilesa-duribhava*). Thus, our thinking process becomes wise enough to find and fix its error by itself. Thus, we can control our thoughts and cultivate mindfulness.

Q: What is the Buddhist understanding of free will?

A: If you are angry, for example, your mind is yielding to anger. Then, you will likely do something unskillful due to the anger. You know how harmful nuclear weapons are. They were actually invented by nobody, but by human hatred. It is similar with other mental defilements such as greed, attachment, desire, jealousy, worry, anxiety, regret, pride, delusion, ignorance, and so on. When your mind becomes freed of these mental defilements, it can be said to have "free will."

Q: How can I deal with the voice that thinks about my thoughts? Do I label it as consciousness?

A: How to deal with it is quite simple. Just be aware of it as it really is. That's all. You can label it whatever way you think right. What matters most is to be aware of it as it is.

Q: Must I always label thoughts as "thinking"? Or can I just have an awareness of thinking?

A: Labeling is not necessary if you can do without it, that is, if you are sure you are aware without labeling.

Q: How quickly should I bring my concentration back when thoughts arise?

A: As soon as possible, but don't forget to note the thoughts accurately. (Here, to note an object means to be aware of the object.)

Q: When thoughts arise, I tend not to notice them immediately. When I do finally notice them, should I just return to concentration or breathing or note it and if so, how long should I note it for?

A: Later in due course of time, you will be able to notice them immediately. It is very important to note them before you return to the concentration or breathing. You should note them as long as they are going on, but actually they stop right away if you note them precisely and accurately.

AWARENESS OF DHAMMA

(Dhamma-nupassana)

Regarding the awareness of Dhamma, in the Satipatthana Sutta, the Buddha expounded on it in five groups:

1. The Five Hindrances
2. The Five Aggregates of Clinging,
3. The Twelve Sense Bases
4. The Seven Factors of Enlightenment
5. The Four Noble Truths

Actually, mental and physical phenomena themselves are sorted into five aggregates or twelve sense-bases. So, by observing those mental and physical phenomena and experiencing their causality and impermanence, we will realize Seven Factors of Enlightenment and Four-fold Noble Truth at the same time, we will eradicate five hindrances, when we attain *magga-phala* enlightenments. So, all we need to do is to observe the mind and body from moment to moment.

Awareness of Dhamma

As a matter of fact, 'Dhamma' here refers to all kinds of mental and physical phenomena, and therefore any kind of awareness, such as awareness of the body, sensations or thoughts can be called *dhamma-nupassana*. However, the observation of bodily actions has been already counted as *kaya-nupassana*, sensations as *vedana-nupassana*, thoughts as *citta-nupassana*. Thus, only the five senses namely seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching should be counted as dhamma. That is why Mahasi Sayadaw instructed us simply to observe these senses in the case of *dhamma-nupassana*. Therefore, it is *dhamma-nupassana* if you note seeing as "seeing". We are expected to experience the phenomena such as color, seeing consciousness or eye, along with their causality and impermanence. In the same way, the rest of the senses should also be understood: sound, hearing consciousness and ear; smell, smelling consciousness and nose; taste, tasting consciousness and tongue; touchable object, touching consciousness and body.

Ven. Cula-panthaka

Although the observation of senses is taken as *dhamma-nupassna* as mentioned above, it is reasonable to assume that awareness of any kind of mental or physical phenomena can be said to be *dhamma-nupassana*. As an example, we should take Venerable Cula-panthaka who was fully enlightened by intensely observing a piece of white cloth, and focusing on how it became dirty. In this case, it is very difficult to know what object he took for his awareness. So, it is not certain whether he practiced awareness of the body, sensations, or mind. In a case like this, it is reasonable to assume that it was awareness of dhamma, *dhamma-nupassana*.

Nun Khema

Regarding this point, let me tell you about the exceptional way in which Nun Khema became enlightened. Being the chief queen of King Bimbisara, she was so proud of her beauty that she would try to avoid seeing the Buddha who allegedly was talking about the negative aspects of physical beauty. The king was a dedicated disciple of the Buddha and had attained the first stage of enlightenment, and he ordered his minstrels to sing in praise of Veluvana monastery's pleasant and peaceful atmosphere. Hearing this , the queen became interested and decided to set out for the monastery.

When the queen arrived at the monastery, the Buddha was expounding the Dhamma to an audience. By his supernormal powers, the Buddha made a very beautiful young lady appear, sitting not far from him, and fanning him. When the queen came to the audience hall, she alone saw the beautiful young lady. Comparing the exquisite beauty of the young lady to that of her own, the queen realized that her beauty was much inferior to that of the young lady. As the queen looked intently again at the young lady, her beauty began to fade gradually. In the end, she saw under her nose an old decrepit being, which again changed into a corpse, her stinking body being attacked by maggots. At that instant, the queen realized the impermanence and worthlessness of beauty. The Buddha knowing the state of her mind remarked as follows:

"O Khema! Look carefully at this decaying body which is built around a skeleton of bones and is subject to disease and decay. Look carefully at the body which is thought of so highly by the foolish. Look at the worthlessness of the beauty of this young girl."

Two Questions

After hearing this, the queen attained the first stage of enlightenment known as Sotapatti-magga. In this case, a question may be raised: Did she attain sotapatti-magga just by listening to the Dhamma talk? Actually, many similar incidents can be found in the Pali texts. In cases like this, the commentaries unanimously and firmly say that nobody can attain any level of enlightenment without observing mental and physical phenomena, their causality and impermanence. Therefore, the queen or many others under similar conditions are believed to have observed mind and body while listening to the Dhamma talk, and saw impermanence. These are exceptional people who have mature *parami* (spiritual talent or aptitude accumulated life after life) like the scientist, Isaac Newton who could formulate the theories of universal gravitation just by seeing a fruit falling from a tree. Millions of us could not do that even though we have been seeing fruit falling from trees for years, even if a durian falls on our head!

Another possible question is: "Which type of awareness did the queen or Ven. Cula-panthaka practice; body, sensation, mind or Dhamma?" Here, awareness of dhamma (*dhammanupassna*) should be the answer because it can cover many kinds of awareness.

All We Need to Do

Anyway, all we need to do is note seeing as "seeing, seeing" when the mental state of seeing arises into our mind stream. Similarly with hearing, smelling, tasting, touching. So, while sitting, if you hear noise, note it as "hearing, hearing", with attention to the internal object, that is, hearing rather than external object, i.e., the noise. When noise disappears, we should go back right away to the rising and falling. If the noise lasts long, we should ignore it and try to focus on the rising and falling. Similarly with smell. Regarding touching, when rising and falling are not obvious enough for awareness, we are usually instructed to observe touching especially between buttock and floor, or between two hands.

BENEFITS OF VIPASSANA PRACTICE

There are five kinds of benefits we can gain from Vipassana practice

The First Benefit

Mental purification from the defilements is the first benefit of vipassana practice. Nowadays, we try our best to make ourselves beautiful and good-looking. We try to make our face look better and nicer by using several kinds of cosmetics; we make every part of our body beautiful, hair, eyebrows, eyelashes, nose, lips, teeth, breast, waist, buttocks, legs and so on. We even spend thousands of dollars on plastic surgery to make our appearance better and nicer. However, we forget one thing that makes us uglier than anything else in the world can do. Do you know what it is? Please raise your hands. [Some of the students raised their hands and said 'It is anger that makes us ugly, and another another said 'worry']

Yes, you're right. It is the mental defilements that make us ugly, more so than anything else in the world. We have mental defilements such as greed, attachment, anger, hatred, ill-will, delusion, ignorance, jealousy, conceit, covetousness, worry, anxiety and so on. Now, you are teenagers, and you are young and beautiful like angels. But, no matter how beautiful or good-looking you may be, if you are angry, you will become as ugly as a demon. You can read somebody else's mind through his or her facial expressions. For example, if somebody feels jealous of your success, his or her face will become obviously ugly and disgraceful. You can easily observe this. In the same way, you can see how ugly and disgraceful a face can look if it is filled with greed, hatred, conceit and so on.

By practicing meditation, we can keep these mental defilements away. For example, when we feel jealous of somebody else's success, we should note it as 'jealous, jealous'. Thus, we can stop it right away, or at least get control over it. This is called *khanika-pahana* (momentary overcoming). When we are fully enlightened, we get rid of them once and for all. Remember that the less mental defilements you have, the more beautiful you become. That is why if you want to be beautiful, practice meditation rather than spending so much money on the cosmetics.

The Second Benefit

Overcoming sorrow and lamentation, or worry and anxiety is the second benefit. Nowadays, people are more and more stressed because of so many demands made by professionalism, competition and complicated social affairs. Life is no longer simple, but has become more and more complicated.

While material products have improved and become more useful, we have to work harder and harder to meet our insatiable desire for these products. The more you want the more you suffer. In the end, you may end up with more sleepless nights accompanied by depression or even a nervous break-down. Sometimes people even commit suicide because of these desires. Meditation is very helpful to overcome this kind of problem. If you cannot sleep because of worry, you should be aware of this state by noting it as "worry, worry." If your concentration is not strong enough, worry may get the upper hand on you. But don't give up easily; keep on noting "worry, worry" At least you can observe that you are suffering from worry. Eventually, you will be able to keep the worry under control; your mind will calm down, and you will fall asleep. Next time you worry about something or someone, don't take a tranquilizer or sleeping pill, try meditation.

Here, let me tell you about my own experience. About ten years ago, I was in a hospital for an operation. I was very worried about my life and my wife and child who was only two years old at that time. If something went wrong, what would happen to my family without any financial support. The worry made my heart beat faster and faster and my face more and more gloomy. I made every possible attempt to overcome it by chanting or praying or sending metta to all living beings. But all my attempts were in vain. Finally, I noted "worry, worry." I found it easy to focus on the worry because it was so predominant at that moment. After a few moments, it really worked. My mind calmed down and I could finally accept having the operation without worry.

Another time, I got into a car accident in Yangon. A big truck hit my car from behind at a traffic light. My car was destroyed. Even though nothing physically happened to me, I became so anxious and worried that I could not answer when the traffic police asked me questions. Moreover, the car belonged to my meditation center and not to me and I could not afford to fix it. In Burma, we have no car insurance system. I could not even imagine how I could show my face to my teacher after this. In fact, I was so upset that I could not remember the telephone numbers to call the center. Then, fortunately, my meditation practice saved me. I noted "worry, worry" or "anxious, anxious" and after a few minutes, my mind calmed down enough to remember the numbers. Even then, my hands were still shaky, making it difficult to hold the telephone properly. Then again, I noted it as "shaky, shaky". In the end, I was able to manage everything successfully thanks to meditation. So, if you ever get in any trouble and feel very upset, don't do anything silly, but do remember your meditation instructions.

The Third Benefit

Is to put an end to mental and physical pain. Pain is unavoidable in our lives because our physical body is subject to pain even though we are really afraid of experiencing it. From time to time, we may become ill with various diseases that cause us severe pain or discomfort. In a hospital, we may see patients who complain bitterly about their severe pain. Even in our daily lives, we often have to change our physical posture, because any posture we hold for too long will become painful. There are many cases of yogis who were cured of their chronic diseases by meditation. According to scientific research, one possible reason is that many diseases are more or less related to the mind. If we can keep our minds calm and peaceful through meditation, we can reduce diseases to some extent and there are times when they can be totally cured. Mr. Goinka, a well known meditation teacher, once developed a strange headache. Even though he was a wealthy man and was able to go to western countries for treatment he was still not cured. Finally, by practicing vipassana meditation under the guidance of a Burmese teacher, U Ba Khin, his strange headaches were totally cured without any expense.

One day, the Buddha visited one of his close disciples, called Nakula-pita, who was seriously ill. After giving some consoling words, the Buddha said: My Dear devotee, suppose someone got a thorn in his flesh, and tried to take it out with another thorn and unfortunately, the second thorn broke and remained in the flesh. Thus, he suffers a double pain. In the same way, physical pain is the first thorn, and worry about it is the second and so you would have to suffer a double pain. That is why when you have physical illness, be mindful so that you won't suffer from this double pain". Following this advice, Nakula-pita managed to reduce his pain by being mindful of it, and soon fully recovered.

Regarding pain from an injury, a monk who is very close to me said that one day, he got big cut on his foot while walking in the forest, and had it stitched without any anesthetic. He then said that he found meditation works very well. By noting "pain, pain," with full energy, he could calmly accept getting the stitches. Thus, vipassana meditation can help us to overcome pain at least in a temporary way. To put a complete end to all physical and mental pain we need to practice until full enlightenment. So, when you are facing pain, please remember to first use meditation rather than painkillers.

The Fourth Benefit

Is to attain insight knowledge. By noting whatever is experienced through our senses, we can see the true characteristics of mind and body. We can experience our body in terms of the four fundamental elements :

1. Earth element - Hardness, softness, heaviness, and lightness
2. Fire element - warmth, heat, cool and cold
3. Water element - Liquidity, fluidity
4. Wind element - pressure, tension, tightness, and vibration.

Our mind can be experienced in terms of: sensations or feelings (vedana), thoughts (citta), and senses (Dhamma). In due course, we will be able to see their causality and changes from moment to moment. In this way, vipassana insight knowledge begins to develop.

The Fifth Benefit

Is to experience Nibbana. Here, "nibbana" literally means non-attachment. All sufferings come from attachment. For example, a few days ago, I saw a funeral in the Neranjana river as I was walking on the bridge. It was a woman. I reflected that if she were my girl friend, I would be suffering a lot. You might not even see me here, giving a talk like this. However, she was not my girlfriend. I had no attachments to her, and so I was not worried at all.

That is why the Buddha said: "Worry comes from attachment; danger comes from attachment, there is no worry or danger for those who have no attachments." Once we are detached from something or someone, we will find ourselves tranquil and peaceful. This is the literal meaning of "nibbana". It is also defined in another sense as '*asankhata*, unconditioned. Here, all mental and physical phenomena are conditioned, and *nibbana* is unconditioned. It is totally the opposite of mind and body in all aspects not unlike darkness and light. It can also be described as ' complete peacefulness' that compares approximately to a deep sleep where there is neither sadness nor sensual pleasure, only a tranquility that is far superior to any kinds of sensual pleasure. This is the highest benefit you can gain from practicing vipassana meditation.

Benefits of Meditation
Question and Answer

Q: Generosity (*dana*) brings happiness and prosperity to others, and morality (*sila*) safeguards other's life, wealth and health. Vipassana practice, however, cannot be seen doing any good to others. How can it result in wealth, health and higher rebirth like the other two?

A: By practicing vipassana, you become aware of your good or bad activities and negative or positive emotions. Thus, it helps minimize kilesas (unwholesome mental states) such as greed, selfishness, hatred, jealousy, conceit, ingratitude, hostility, delusion and so on. Naturally, the less the kilesa you have, the kinder you become and the purer your morality. Thus, vipassana practice can excel all other merit.

Moreover, when your mind is purified of kilesas, it naturally brings you good fortune and protects you from misfortune. These are two of four functions of good mind-set, called *upathambhaka* and *upapilaka*. To elaborate this point, greed and selfishness, for example, encourages you to cheat others; sexual desire might make you a rapist; due to sensual desire you might become a drug addict; jealousy pushes you to destroy or degrade other people's achievements; hatred might motivate you to commit murder. Thus, misfortune gets a chance to befall you sooner or later. On the other hand, by practicing vipassana, you will become aware more of yourself. As a result, you will become kinder and smarter than before, and more likely to get involved in good than evil. Thus, good luck naturally comes to you sooner rather than later.

Regarding higher rebirth, actually vipassana is practiced for enlightenment and liberation. According to Pali texts, however, even the highest vipassana insight called *gotrabhu* can still result in rebirth unless you are fully enlightened. So, the rebirth that is produced by Vipassana merit can even excel those by dana and sila because vipassana involves more wholesome mental states.

CRITERION FOR A VIPASSANA OBJECT

The diversity of teachings available today can be quite confusing. There are various teachers with many different methods for developing insight, or vipassana. The Mahasi Sayadaw taught meditators (yogis) to observe four kinds of objects: body, feeling, states of mind and general objects. The primary objects of attention in the Mahasi method are the rise and fall of the abdomen while sitting and sensations in the feet during walking. Some other teachers instruct yogis to focus on the in-and-out breath as a primary object. In one tradition, meditators are instructed to breathe so vigorously that they foam at the mouth, and may even fall unconscious to the floor. One famous teacher from India gives guidance to yogis to mentally move through the body and observe sensations, from head to toe, and then from toe to head. In Burma, one of the most highly respected teachers taught yogis to observe their mind or thoughts as a main object of attention. He often said: "You can practice meditation even while cooking in the kitchen or driving on busy roads. It is not as difficult as you might think. Just focus on your mind or thoughts and be aware of them as they are."

Paramattha

So, it is good to know the criterion for a Vipassana object. First of all, a vipassana object must be *paramattha*, that means what really exists in our experience (*atta-paccakkha*). For example, when you see an apple, you may experience its color; when you touch it, there may be the experience of hardness (earth element), coolness or warmth (fire element), solidity (water element), or pressure (air element). If you eat it, what you can really experience is its taste, smell, and nutritional value. In the realm of direct experience, however, the apple is nowhere to be found: 'apple' is *pannatti*, "conceptual truth". Elements such as hardness, coolness, pressure, color, smell, taste and nutrition, on the other hand, can be directly experienced so they are considered *paramattha*, or "ultimate truth."

In this regard, let me offer one of my own experiences. One day, when I was a teenage novice (monk), I went on alms round. A beautiful girl about my age offered me a cake. As I bent my head to receive it, she also bent hers to offer it, and our foreheads accidentally touched. I felt somewhat lustful and had gooseflesh sensations all over my body. What I actually experienced was not the girl, but just warmth from her forehead. But I identified it with my concept of the beautiful girl. That is why I felt lust. In this case, the warmth was *paramattha* and the girl was *pannatti*.

Internal

A vipassana object should also be internal because you cannot directly experience external objects. When someone feels itchy, for instance, you cannot experience his or her itchiness. Thus, it is clear that an external object cannot be directly experienced. Likewise, when you hear a noise, what you should notice is not the noise, but the process of hearing, which is internal. Note it as "hearing, hearing," rather than "noise, noise." When you are bitten by a mosquito, you note "pain" or itchiness" rather than "biting, biting." A Vipassana object must be an internal phenomenon that you can experience directly for yourself.

Present

A vipassana object must also be arising in the present moment, because past and future cannot be directly experienced. They do not exist in any moment of experience.

If you analyze objects intellectually, you will miss their present characteristics. Therefore, you must observe objects moment to moment without judging, analyzing and reasoning. For example, if you want to see real lightning, you need to see it the moment it strikes. If you intellectually analyze what the lightning is after or before it strikes, it is not real lightning. In order to see a present object you have no time for judging, analyzing or reasoning. That is why it is very important for you to note the object the moment it presents itself. In brief, an object for developing insight must be *paramattha*, internal and immediately present.

Regarding this point, it is worthy to note that any moment can be said to be the best moment for one to practice vipassana because presently arising objects can be experienced every moment. That is why the Buddha has instructed us to be mindful all the time, without neglecting even the moments spent in the restroom.

No Solid Form

There is no solid form in the ultimate sense. According to Pali texts, material form is of three kinds in its smallest size. 'Ratha-renu' is the dust that rises up in the air when a vehicle passes by; 'anu' is the form that can only be seen through the sunrays; and 'paramanu' is the form that cannot be seen by one's naked eyes. Even the smallest material form can be divided repeatedly until there is no solid form but only energy. When you see a form of something or someone, ultimately, it is just an illusion.

No Movement

There is no movement of material objects in the ultimate sense because all mental and physical phenomena are arising and passing away so fast that they have no time for any other kind of movements. So, if you see something or someone moving, it means that it is also just an illusion.

Two Kinds of Vipassana

Here, you may think that vipassana objects and the awareness of them are very limited. Take seawater as an example. If we drink a drop of seawater, we can realize the taste of the whole ocean. It is not necessary to drink an entire ocean. In the same way, if we see clearly any *paramattha* object, we can realize the nature of the entire universe: internal or external, past, present or future: they are all the same in the ultimate sense. Direct experience is called *paccakkha vipassana* (empirical insight); the inferential understanding that follows is *anumana vipassana* (inferential insight).

Balance to Keep

In order to see clearly the objects of insight, it is very important to maintain a balance between faith and reasoning, and between concentration and energy. If you have strong faith and weak reasoning power, you can easily fall victim to blind faith. With strong reasoning and weak faith, on the other hand, you are likely to waste time analyzing or making judgments about your experiences in meditation. If you have strong energy and weak concentration, your mind will wander a lot and become restless. Weak energy with strong concentration, however, often results in relaxation to the point of falling asleep. You need to exert enough energy so that your attention focuses clearly on the object. This energy to pay attention must be balanced with a relaxed receptiveness and not be overly concerned with results.

How Vipassana Is Formed

You can gain mastery over the five hindrances (thoughts of sensual pleasure, aversive thoughts, laziness, mental restlessness and skeptical doubt) simply by noting them the moment they appear. With practice, your concentration and awareness will become strong enough to see beyond their conceptual form to their three characteristics as follows:

1. Individual characteristics (*sabhava-lakkhana*): You will experience hardness, warmth, coolness, tension, tightness, pressure and so on when you note physical objects; pleasantness or unpleasantness when you note sensations; or different thoughts when you note the mind; and seeing, hearing etc., when you note dhamma.

2. Causal characteristics (*sankhata-lakkhana*): You can see the interaction of mind and body while observing them the moment they take place. For instance, a sort of physical disorder arouses itchiness somewhere on your body; the itchiness in turn gives rise to the desire to scratch it; that desire makes your hand move there and scretchs it. While noting your bodily actions, you will find intention as a reason for the actions you do. When cold, desire for a cup of coffee tends to take place and when hot the desire for ice-cream. Thus, you can see the causal charactieristics of mind and body.

3. Common characteristics (*samanna-lakkhana*): After having seen the first two characteristics, you will be able to see the phenomena arising and passing away from moment to moment. Thus, you realize the state of impermanence, suffering and non-self of the phenomena. This is how Vipassana insights are formed, overcoming illusion.

TWO KINDS OF HAPPINESS

According to the Buddha's teaching, there are two kinds of happiness, one with additives (*byaseka-sukha*), and pure happiness without additives (*abyaseka-sukha*). The Buddha gave one illustration of the difference between these two that rings true even today.

The Buddha and Mr. Hatthaka

The occasion for this teaching came one morning during the coldest week of the winter in India, with the wind blowing from all sides. That morning, while the Buddha was practicing meditation under a tree, a gentleman named Hatthaka walked up. Seeing the Buddha, he asked: "Sir, did you have a nice sleep last night?"

"Yes, I did, Hatthaka," the Buddha answered, "I am one of those who sleep well."

But Hatthaka was skeptical, "Venerable Sir, this is the coldest week of the year, and you are sitting on bare dried leaves, under a tree outside, exposed to the wind. How could you sleep well?"

So, the Buddha gave him an example, "Hatthaka, suppose there is a rich man enjoying a romantic night. He is waited upon by four lovely women, lying in a luxurious bed under romantic candlelight. Do you think he would sleep well, Hatthaka?"

"Yes, sir," Hatthaka replied, "he would have a good sleep."

"No, Hatthaka, he wouldn't, because his heart would be scorched by the fires of lust." The Buddha continued, "Hatthaka, I am free of those mental defilements which can burn the heart, and so my mind is perfectly peaceful and tranquil. That's why I am one of those in the world who sleep well."

A Rich Man's Happiness

In this example, the happiness the rich man enjoys is the kind with additives because he has to add so many conditions in order to make his experience pleasurable. In order to have such a romantic night, for example, he has to find a fine house with a beautifully decorated room, a luxurious bed, fancy sheets, soft pillows, and elegant candles, not to mention his lovely companions. Without these factors, there will be neither pleasure nor happiness. Such is called 'happiness with additives', *byaseka-sukha*. This type of happiness is often costly and risky.

Recently I read of a man who sued a nightclub over a bill: twenty-five thousand dollars for a single night in New York! In another recent tragedy, a man allegedly killed his pregnant wife for the sake of pleasure and happiness with his new lover. He may well suffer a life sentence or the death penalty if convicted. Even in the Pali texts we find such stories of people paying a great price for their pleasures.

An Immortal King

Actually, this type of happiness is just an illusion created by insatiable desire. I once read a story that illustrated this point well about a king who had gained immortality through his magic powers. He spent his time looking for tasty foods and the most beautiful women in the world, all in the attempt to be happy. Actually, like most of us, he could not love any particular food or any particular woman for very long. He tried one type of tasty food after another and one beautiful woman after another. Being an immortal king, as time went by, he had eaten millions of different kinds of food and had made millions of beautiful women his queens. In the end, however, he could find no food or woman that could make him permanently happy, so in despair he committed suicide by jumping into the ocean. This story shows that although we may think something else will be better than what we have, if we see the object clearly, we often find it not as pleasurable as we expected. It is at these times, that we are simply under the illusion of insatiable desire. These kinds of pleasure can never satisfy our insatiable desires. Such happiness is never satisfactory. This is another negative aspect of the *byaseka-sukha* that we human beings are constantly seeking.

Abyaseka-sukha

The second type of happiness, the one the Buddha had, is the state of freedom from mental defilements. The Buddha had no delusion, no confusion, no craving for anything or anybody at all, no anger, no hatred or aversion, no conceit, no jealousy, no sensual or sexual desire. He didn't need a luxurious bed or a partner in order to be happy. He had complete happiness, which comes from freedom from mental defilements. This is called *abyaseka-sukha,* the happiness without additives, or pure happiness. We cannot find this real happiness in our heart when we are overwhelmed by lust or craving, when we are angry about something or someone, when we are jealous of another's achievements, and so on. Thus, it is clear that where there are mental defilements there can be no pure happiness; where there is pure happiness there are no mental defilements. In general, we don't need to look for real happiness in parties, nightclubs, or discos. This pure happiness does not require any luxurious bed or any partner at all. It simply comes from lack of mental defilements.

Three Ways to Pure Happiness: There are three ways to keep our mind away from those mental defilements (*kilesa*) and gain pure and complete happiness:

1. There are three ways to overcome *kilesa.* First of all, *samatha* practice can overcome kilesa to some extent, or for some period. Metta, for example, can reduce dosa-related mental kilesa, such as anger, hatred, jealousy and so on; meditation on death can reduce our ego-related kilesa such as conceit, superiority, rivalry, etc.; *anapana* can results in very powerful concentration that can stop kilesa from arising. Thus, *samatha* can stop mental defilements for long from arising (*vikkhambhana-pahana*).
2. Secondly, vipassana can prevent kilesa from arising or increasing. By noting mind and body from moment to moment, there will be no chance for kilesa to take place. When they take place, we can note and overcome them too (*tadanga-pahana*, temporary way of overcoming kilesa). Thus, the less the kilesa, the more the happiness.
3. When we are fully enlightened by practicing vipassana itself, all kinds of kilesa are eradicated, *smuccheda-pahana* (complete eradication of kilesa). Thus, complete and eternal happiness can be attained.

KAMMA AND REBIRTH

I think it is boring for you to listen to the talks about vipassana every day. So, today, I've planned to talk about something different, and selected a brain-storming topic called 'Kamma and Rebirth'. Another purpose is I want you to have a wider understanding of the Buddha's teaching even though I realize that you may find it difficult to accept it. Anyway, if you get confused about 'kamma and rebirth', I'll take it as my success because being 'confused' means you believe that it may be possible.

There has been a great deal of scientific research proving the possibility of rebirth. As a matter of fact, it is not so unusual to find someone who can relate his past life. Let me tell you about some of my friends who can remember and relate their past lives. One of my teachers, who is the rector or the head of the Theravada University in Burma, can remember his past life. Once, upon seeing his mother buying potatoes, he said: "mum, why did you buy potatoes, I'll show you how to grow them." His mother was shocked by his strange words because he was just four or five years old. He told her he was a farmer in his past life and as far as he could remember, he was from the Shan tribe in eastern Burma. He told her that he had come down with the plague and traveled to Mandalay the second biggest city in Burma, for a treatment. But he was too late. He died in Mandalay and was then reborn into a rich family.

One of my close friends who is a resident monk in England can also remember his past life. He said he was the father of four daughters and was also a thief during British colonial days. He became involved in three murder cases and was finally killed in a fight. When he was young, he used to visit his past-life wife and daughters who lived in a village not very far from his.

A Story from Dhammapada

Here, let me tell you one more story from the Dhammapada. One man loved his wife very much, but she had a love affair with his younger brother who ended up killing him. When he died, due to the force of his attachment to his wife, he was reborn in her house as her pet dog. He was so attached to her that he followed her everywhere, even into the restroom and the bedroom. Eventually, she became so annoyed that she had him put down. However, because he was still so attached to her, he was once again reborn in her household, this time as a calf. Eventually, he was put down again for the same reason. Next, he was reborn as a snake in the same place. As a snake, he was able to slip into her bedroom through the ceiling and saw her making love with a man. He became so upset that he fell down onto her bed, and once again got himself killed.

Finally, he was reborn as her son. But, remembering all the times before that he had been killed by his mother, he would not even allow her to touch him. In fact, whenever she tried to touch him, he cried in panic and had to be taken care of by his grandmother. When he came of age, he revealed to his grandmother about his past lives and of often being killed by his present mother. Both he and his grandmother became so disenchanted with the cycle of existence that they ordained and practiced until they were fully liberated.

Two Mental Energies

There are two mental energies that create one's rebirth: *tanha* (craving) and *kamma* (intention). In this Dhammapada story, the craving for his wife was the energy that created his rebirth as her pet dog, calf, snake and finally her son. You know why giraffes in Africa have such long neck and why polar bears are white? The giraffes have long necks probably because their ancestors craved for leaves to eat from tall trees. Eventually their necks became longer and longer until they are the size you see them today. For polar bears a white color is helpful for hunting in the snow. This might be the reason why their ancestors craved being white [the students laughed]

Nobody in the world wants to die. This means everybody is craving for life. Craving is a mental energy that creates a life after death in accordance to one's good or bad kamma.

Another energy is Kamma, which literally means the intention behind every action we do, like an action taken to make others happy or unhappy. These kind of intentions actually arise and pass away along with our actions. However, they leave behind a sort of mental energy which lie dormant in our mental process from moment to moment and from life to life. This is called kamma or karma. According to this karmic energy, the very craving for life creates another life after death. For example, if we have accumulated wholesome karmic energy by doing good deeds (like help based on kindness, giving, moral conduct and so on), we will have a higher quality rebirth. If we have accumulated unwholesome deeds like killing and stealing. we will have a lower rebirth, like a dog or calf.

Criterion for Good or Bad Kamma

Here, let me explain some more about good or bad kamma. Kamma is of two kinds, wholesome and unwholesome. When we do an action, if our intention is associated with selfishness (lobha), hatred or aversion (dosa), and delusion (moha), this intention and its dormant energy is considered unwholesome kamma. For example, killing involves selfishness, hatred and delusion, which are called unwholesome roots. On the other hand, if our intention goes along with unselfishness (alobha), love or compassion (adosa), and wisdom (amoha), this type of intention is called wholesome (kusala) kamma.

For example, if we sincerely help someone, we will find our mind involves unselfishness, kindness and wisdom. However, if we hate someone, it is almost impossible for us to help him. Suppose we give a gift to someone (dana), or refrain from harming or cheating someone (sila). Unselfishness is present; kindness is present; wisdom is present. So, it is very logical that good kamma has good results, and bad kamma has bad results. Depending on our kamma, our craving for life creates a higher or lower rebirth.

What Difference Have You Made?

Every second, living beings are being born into the world. Some are born as a domesticated animals such as cows or goats and others may become pets. Even for human beings, some are born wealthy, with a silver spoon in their mouth while others become homeless or beggars. There are cases in which parents become wealthy and healthy, or get poorer with many problems beginning around the time of the birth of their child. How about you? Since you were born you can know what type of person you are by what difference you have made to your parents lives. Are they happy and healthy? Have they become richer or poorer?

Differences in Our Daily Life

In our daily life, we may have a particular 'gift' which has very little or nothing to do with our knowledge or efforts. You can often find someone who is lucky with particular things. For example, some people are lucky with their cars. They always have a good car, make a lot of money from selling it and never have a car accident. Others are gifted with houses. They always own a fine house and make money from the sale of their house. In the same way, some people are lucky getting good food; some with good clothing; some with good friends; some with a good spouse; some with good parents and some with good teachers. Some people are very lucky with more than one thing. They are wealthy, healthy, very popular, and highly educated. Others are wealthy but not healthy; healthy and wealthy but not very popular nor educated. Some are unlucky; they are homeless, uneducated and sickly too.

When I was a monk, I found one of my fellow monks often won the lucky draw, but I never did. For me, I am not gifted with food. I often find myself hungry; often miss out on getting good food for one reason or another. I am, however, lucky with friends and teachers. I always get good opportunities to meet good friends and good teachers who are so kind and helpful to me.

These differences are not random incidents, nor coincidence. Our gifts and talents are directly related to our kamma. Chance or opportunity has little or nothing to do with our knowledge or efforts to have good things.

Kamma and Rebirth Questions and Answers

Q: Is it necessary to believe in rebirth to be a Buddhist?

A: If you can observe the five-precepts, you can be a Buddhist because it is universal morality highly recommended by the Buddha. However, it is almost impossible to keep these five-precepts if you don't believe in kamma and rebirth.

Q: Can you explain exactly what kamma is, and how it is formed when we do something.

A: Kamma is the intention behind every action you do. Intention can be compared to the driver, and your actions to the car itself. If you break traffic rules and regulations, you are responsible, not the car, right? In the same way, intention or volition is responsible for our actions. Although it disappears along with our actions, its energy is left dormant in our mental process, similar to what is impressed on our memory. That is what kamma is and how it is formed.

Q: Are certain social hierarchies like chickens which are bred for food consumption and cloning a human being the result of kamma?

A: Rebirth consciousness can take place in any physical condition that is suitable for its survival. This type of rebirth is called *samsedaja* (rebirth in external mucus, like insects). There are three more kinds of rebirth mentioned in Pali texts: *andaja* rebirth in an egg, *gabbhaseyyak* rebirth in a mother's womb, and *opapatika* celestial rebirth. According to the law of cause and effect, any type of rebirth consciousness results from one's kamma.

Q: How can you explain life, death and rebirth in brief?

A: Our mind and body is arising and passing away every moment. That means we are dying and reborn every moment. That means life and death and rebirth.

Q: How does one who understands the dhamma remain karmically neutral?

A: One can become karmically neutral if he or she is no longer attached to rebirth, which is a karmic domain. Let me explain it furthermore. Nobody wants to die. We want to live forever. That means we are attached to life. This attachment gives rise to rebirth. When we fully understand that there is nothing but mental and physical phenomena and their interactions, we will be no longer attached to rebirth. Thus, there will be no more rebirth nor karmic effect any more.

WRONG VIEWS

In the Pali Texts, there are mentioned sixty-two kinds of wrong view. Today, I would like to explain three of them: ahetuka-ditthi, visamahetu-ditthi and pubbekatahetu-ditthi.

A-hetuka-ditthi

means belief in "no cause". In accordance with this view, people believe that everything arises and passes away randomly without any reason. They don't believe in the laws of cause and effect; they don't believe in kamma and its good or bad results; they don't believe in a God or a creator. They tend to do whatever they feel like doing without a concern of the consequences. For example, they will not avoid killing, stealing or sexual misconduct; they may not perform deeds of kindness and care. They most definitely will be selfish and never think of others's welfare. Thus, they will naturally tend towards doing evil rather than good. That is why the Buddha said this view is harmful not only to others but also to the view-holders themselves.

Visama-hetu-ditthi

means belief in wrong cause. In Buddha's time, many people believed in wrong causes. For example, people believed that disasters such as earthquakes, storms or thunder was created by an angry god. Their lives were under control of the guardian devas or spirits. That is why they even took refuge in the mountains like the Himalayas or Mt. Fuji, or in rivers like the Ganges.

The Buddha mentioned this in the Dhammapada:

"Many people frightened by danger and disasters take refuge in mountains, forests, giant trees and spirit places."

Even in modern days, there are many people in the world, who accept several kinds of superstitions. For example, they don't like the number 13, and they often say "knock on wood!" or "cross your fingers!" These are all superstitious signs. Although we were all born from our mothers, people still believe in a creator. In the old days, people believed that it was Brahma God who created us and everything else. Even their day-to-day lives were believed to be predetermined by the Brahma God. Once the Buddha put some questions to a Brahman who said, "Brahmans were born from the God's mouth:"

"Brahman, did you ever seen a Brahman baby girl born?"

"Yes, I did," the Brahman replied, "I saw it several times."

The Buddha continued, "Did you see a Brahman girl become an adolescent?"

"Yes, I did."

"You saw her become a teenager, right?"

"Yes, that is right."

"You saw her get married, didn't you?"

"Yes, I did."

"You saw her pregnant, right?"

"Yes, I did."

"Then," the Buddha continued, "you saw her give birth to a son, right?"

"Yes, I did."

"Do you know from which part of her body the Brahman baby was born?"

"Oh, yes, I do."

Then the Buddha asked, “Is that God’s mouth you were all born from?”

“No way, Gotama.”

The Buddha’s questions were very embarrassing to the Brahman, but they were really simple and logical. They were an example of beliefs in a wrong cause.

Pubbekata-hetu-ditthi

This refers to an extreme belief in Kamma. Some people attribute their success and failure to their past kamma. They believe that it is due to one’s past kamma that he or she becomes a millionaire or a beggar, a king or a slave, educated or not educated, beautiful or ugly, healthy or sickly. According to the Buddha’s teaching, kamma can be compared to a seed that requires a suitable amount of sun, water, fertilizer so that it can grow well and bear fruit. A seed alone bears no fruit. In the same way, kamma requires wisdom and effort to yield results. Here, let me tell you the Jataka story of the three fish.

The Three Fish

One day, a fisher man caught three fish. One of the fish believed in kamma. He did not make any effort to escape and just rested in the boat. He believed that if he was lucky, he would escape.

The second fish believed in making an effort. He believed that if he made enough effort, he could escape. He tried his best to escape jumping up again and again. The fisherman became so annoyed by this that he beat him to death. The poor “extreme effort-believer” was killed on the spot.

The third fish was very smart. He believed that wisdom was necessary for success. He waited for the right time to jump out of the boat. The moment the boat tipped to one side, he leapt out and managed to escape. The poor "extreme kamma-believer", however, was cooked by the fisherman's wife.

That is why it is said in the Buddhist scripture:

"Kamma materializes depending on timing, character, effort, wisdom and the conditions of one's life."

Now, I hope you have a better understanding of kamma and rebirth. Maybe, you are confused. I am happy if you become confused because 'confused' means that you at least believe half of it.

As a conclusion, I would like to give a brief summary on the 'Kalama Sutta' a very well-known discourse given by the Buddha regarding kamma and rebirth.χ

Kalama Sutta

The kalamas, who were citizens of the town of Kesamutti, had been visited by various religious teachers with divergent views, each of whom would advocate his own doctrines and tear down the doctrines of those who preceded him. This left the Kalamas perplexed. When "the recluse Gotama," who was reputed to be an Awakened One, arrived in their township they approached him in the hope that he might be able to dispel their confusion. From the subsequent development of

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χ There is a concern about the misinterpretation of this Sutta. Regarding this point, my close Dhamma friends, Kenneth Morris and Barbara Janis wrote the following: " In the past, Western students have entirely misinterpreted it [the Kalama Sutta] to mean that they can trust themselves. Obviously, the Buddha knew the Kalamas had enough wise discernment and integrity to self inspect with total honesty. Otherwise, it becomes an excuse for following ones own delusion… Take a look at the American version of Theravadan Buddhism to see how this gets interpreted."

the Sutta, it is clear that the issues baffling them were the realities of rebirth and karmic retribution for good and evil deeds.

The Buddha said as follows:

"Come, Kalamas.

1. Do not go upon what has been acquired by repeated hearing,
2. nor upon tradition;
3. nor upon rumor;
4. nor upon scripture;
5. nor upon surmise;
6. nor upon axiom;
7. nor upon specious reasoning;
8. nor upon bias towards a notion pondered over;
9. nor upon another's seeming ability;
10. nor upon the consideration 'the monk is our teacher."

"When you yourselves know: 'these things are bad, blamable, censured by the wise; undertaken and observed, these things lead to harm and ill,' abandon them. When you yourselves know: 'These things are good, blameless, praised by the wise; undertaken and observed, these things lead to benefit and happiness,' enter on and abide in them."

"Greed, hate and delusion, being conducive to harm and suffering for oneself and others, are to be abandoned, and their opposites, being beneficial to all, are to be developed."

"A Noble disciple, devoid of covetousness and ill will, un-deluded dwells pervading the world with boundless loving-kindness, compassion, appreciative joy and equanimity. Thus purified of hate and malice, he enjoys here and now four "solaces":

1. If there is an afterlife and karmic result, then he will undergo a pleasant rebirth,
2. If there is none he still lives happily here and now;
3. If evil results befall an evil-doer, then no evil will befall him;
4. And if evil results do not befall an evil-doer, then he is purified anyway.

WHAT YOUR ACHIEVEMENTS ARE

During this three week retreat, what have you achieved?

The First Achievement

Your first achievement is keeping the Five-precepts. During the retreat, you observed the five-precepts fully, right? And during the retreat, you did not kill any living beings; you did not steal and destroy anybody's belongings; you did not commit sexual misconduct; you did not tell a lie and you did not take any kind of intoxicating drink or drugs. Right? Thus, by observing the five-precepts fully or to some extent, you gave a great gift to humans and other living beings. For example, you did not kill a mosquito which means you allowed it to stay alive. That is great gift; You did not cheat or do harm to anybody, that also is a great gift you granted to others. This is your first great achievement during the retreat. Be happy with this.

The second achievement

'Noble Silence' is something you may not have even thought about before. When people get together, they often get involved in speaking ill about others. (gossiping, slandering). Just put yourself in another's shoes and imagine how you would feel if somebody was to speak ill of you. This is why the Buddha advised us thus: "Monks, getting together you may make wholesome speech, or keep noble silence." Unnecessary speaking often does more harm to you than good. So, you should learn how to observe "noble silence". Nowadays, in the States, a friend of mine said: "U Hla Myint, the 'Chat Room' (on the internet) is a big problem amongst people. You know, there are many couples who end up suffering a divorce because of this 'chat room'". I don't know what people are speaking about in these chat rooms. [students laughed] Anyway, we should always speak morally, or keep 'noble silence'. Otherwise, we will have to suffer from unnecessary problems.

The third achievement

Being 'vegetarian' is the third achievement. The Buddha ate meat, and also allowed his monks to have it, because they are supposed to eat whatever food they are offered by supporters based upon whatever is available to them. The Buddha, however, laid down the rule for monks not to eat meat from any kind of animal if that monk sees, hears or even suspects the animal is being killed for him. Otherwise, a monk is allowed to eat whatever is available because, when he eats already dead meat, he is not harming or killing any living being. In another tradition, monks don't eat meat, but they do wear silk robes that are produced by killing thousands of insects; and they use leather products like shoes. There are monks of other beliefs who will not breathe without using a filter because they are afraid an insect may get killed in their nose. The Buddha takes 'the middle way', he never goes too far; he is not an extremist. He allows anyone to eat vegetarian food if they prefer it, and would surely be happy if you are eating vegetarian food to avoid letting animals die. So, during this retreat, you ate vegetarian. This could also be said to be an achievement of sorts.

The fourth achievement

The development of metta is the fourth achievement. Two or three times every day during the retreat, you developed meṭṭa: "May all living beings be well and happy." According to the Buddha's teaching, if you spend your time wishing living beings happiness, it means that you are living 'a noble life' (Brahma-vihara).

The Fifth achievement

Insight knowledge (to some extent). During the retreat, by observing your physical actions, sensations, thoughts and general objects the moment they occur to you, you experience: physical phenomena like hardness, heaviness, lightness, pressure, tension, vibration, warmth, coldness and so on; and mental phenomena like several kinds of sensation, thoughts and senses in terms of their true characteristics. That is the insight into the mind and body process.

You may also see causality. For example, when you do an action, you may notice the intention occurring beforehand. Thus you can realize the (mental) intention as the cause of your (physical) action. Or, sometimes, you may find that heat arouses the desire to take a cool shower. Thus, you realize (physical) heat as the cause of the (mental) desire. By noting your bodily or mental actions, you can gain insight into mind and body (*Nama-rupa-pariccheda-nana*), and the insight into their causality (*paccaya-pariggaha-nana*). These two insights are very important because all the higher insights are based on them. I believe you have attained these two important insights during the retreat. This is the most important achievement.

So, about your achievements I just would like to say congratulations. Above all else, I would like to express my satisfaction with your zealous participation in this retreat.

Thank you all very much in deed.

May you all be well and happy; may you be able to enjoy the great benefits of Vipassana meditation for your lifetime.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS IN GENERAL

Q: Can Meditation make someone crazy?

A: No, not at all. However, people with mental disorders often try meditation with the hope to ease their symptoms. Here, the problem is that they are likely to put too much pressure on their fragile minds making their condition worse. If they know how to adjust their mental state, or in other words, how to relax without putting too much pressure on their mind, meditation can be helpful to them.

Q: Is your teacher, U Pandita, fully enlightened?

A: I'm not in a position to make judgement of his enlightenment, but one thing I can say for sure is he is enlightened to some extent.

Q: How about you?

A; Anybody can enjoy benefits of meditation more or less if he or she practices with full faith and energy. I am one of them. Don't worry, we are teaching true vipassana. You can be fully enlightened if you practice it with full faith and energy, no matter whether your teacher is fully enlightened or not. In the Pali texts, we find many noble people who were fully enlightened, practicing under the guidance of qualified teachers who were not enlightened yet, like Maha-siva, a highly educated senior monk, under whose guidance thousands of monks were fully enlightened while he himself was still an ordinary person.

Q: Do you think highly of youself when you sit on a higher place teaching American students?

A: I don't think so because I follow the advice of the Buddha. In order to protect romantic feeling from arising when a monk meets a woman, the Buddha advice Venerable

Ananda to regard a woman as his sister, daughter, mother or aunt according to her age. You are all at the age of my son and daughter. Honestly, I regard you all as my own children in order to protect myself from being nervous in front of the audience, and to keep my mind away from any kind of unwholesome mental state. For a father, it is impossible to think highly of himself just because speaks to his children. He is most likely to have love and compassion instead of pride or conceit. Honestly, I see you as my own son. Why don't you take me as your own father so that there will be no room for any unwholesome attitude between us. (He laughed)

Q: Why did you decide to leave the monastery and get married? Didn't your teacher mind?

A: I fell in love with a woman and left the monastery. Now, she is my wife. As long as you do not attain the third level of enlightenment, called *anagami*, you still have sensual and sexual desire and are liable to disrobe. My teacher was ok. He is wise and understood my decision.

Q: How can these practices be applied and strengthened in the lay lifestyle? How can you measure success/progress? Do you need to?

A: With the help of meditation, we can become aware of our thoughts and emotions. Thus we can overcome negative mental states that are harmful to our daily lives. Meditation can be sustained and strengthened by practicing regualarly for at least a half an hour a day. It is too early, however, for you to make a judgment of your success in meditation.

Q: How can I use this practice to make my romantic relationships and my relationship to music more pure?

A: Actually our romantic life is often destroyed by conceit or ego, or sometimes lust itself. The bigger your ego is the less the harmony between you and your partner, and lust often leads you to extra love affairs. Meditation can reduce such negative emotions making your romantic relationships nicer and safer. Your music skill might improve because of a peaceful and calm mind.

Q: What takes place in the enlightened physical body when death occurs?

A: Nothing special. Like anybody else's body it becomes rotten and eventually turns into dust. That is, unless one makes a special determination such as "May my body leave relics behind after it gets burned."

Q: What does the Satipatthana-sutta mean by observing "internally and externally"?

A: Vipassana insight is of two kinds: empirical knowledge and inferential knowledge. For the first one you must observe internal objects but not external ones. You can not experience anybody else's thoughts or pain, but only your own. However, just by observing internal phenomena, you can spontaneously realize anyone else's phenomena or even the entire universe. Thus, inferential knowledge can spontaneously accompany empirical knowledge. For example, you can know the taste of the whole ocean by drinking a drop of it; you don't need to drink the whole ocean. Thus you can experience phenomena internally and externally.

Q: Is the concept of "making friends with oneself" a good way of thinking about samatha/vipassana practice?

A: By practicing samatha/ vipassana, you can gain a better understanding of yourself in general. Misunderstanding breaks up friendships; understanding sustains them.

Q: What is the role of emotions in Buddhism?

A: Negative emotions such as anger and sexual desire, may encourage you to commit murder, or rape. Positive ones, such as metta and compassion will help you become a kind and good person.

Q: How important is having the goal of enlightenment in this practice?

A: Delusion and enlightenment are diametrically opposite. The choice is yours.

Q: Is there a good meditation to do before bed?

A: I recommend practicing metta before bed, and vipassana is good anytime.

Q: How does one deal with strong emotions in meditation? For example, why do I sometimes get angry or upset, or sometimes happy and elated when I am meditating? How does one handle or remove Dosa (anger or hatred)?

A: The only way to deal with emotions that arise in meditation is to note them. Here, noting means being aware of them as they really are. Labeling or naming them is helpful for the precise and accurate perception of them.

Q: When I am practicing, I experience a very pleasurable, relaxed, and calm state of mind where my attention feels deeper and my thoughts are easier to control. Should I develop this state if I can and what exactly is this state?

A: When your concentration becomes strong, negative emotions and thoughts cannot interfere with the practice. Then, this type of pleasurable state of mind takes place. If you become attached to it, your progress will stagnate there. This problem is known as the vipassana obstacle. All you need to do is note it as it is.

Q: The basis of Buddhism is the Four Noble Truths. I understand the concept that dukkha is not a negative view of the world, but it a realistic view. I like the realism of the Four Noble Truths. I think that in theory they work very well. However, in everyday life where situations are not simple, pain is real, and the truth is not always clear, do the the Four Noble Truths really hold up? Do they really work? Are they realistic? Buddhism still exists because everyone in the world still suffers, is it really useful to live a life constantly trying to end suffering?

A: When my son was about six years old, he used to be attached to his dolls that were made of plastic. Once I broke one of them accidently, he cried blaming me for that. Now, at the age of 14, he is no longer attached to them. He didn't even care, when they were all given away. He is no longer happy or unhappy about them. It is because he becomes mature enough to realize that they are all plastic, nothing else. In the same way, when we realize that there is nothing but mental and physical phenomena and their interaction, we will become calm and tranquil rather than happy or unhappy.

For elaboration, *dukkha* is of three kinds. First, physical pain is called *dukkha-dukkha*, as it is really unpleasant. Second, pleasure is *viparinama-dukkha*, as it is impermanent. Third, all kinds of mental and physical phenomena including the first two are *sankhara-dukkha*, as they are all conditioned. Therefore, in brief, realizing mental and physical phenomena as they are, means realizing *dukkha-sacca*. This realization itself helps overcome attachment, *samudaya-sacca*, the source of *dukkha*. Non-attachment means nibbana, *niroda-sacca*. Vipassana meditation and its resultant enlightenment is the path to that state, which is called *magga-sacca*. These are realistic not only in theory but also in everyday practice. However, all I can do to prove it is to let you practice samatha and vipassana until certain level of concentration and awareness.

Q: By realizing the four noble truths, are we to remove all meaning from our life?

A: Life is a kind of dream. That is why the Buddha compared life to mirage (*marici*) and foam (*phena*). It can be a sweet dream or a nightmare according to our good or bad kamma. Whatever it may be, dream is dream, nothing else. It can be easy to accept life as a dream, if we see somebody else's life on his death bed, or things turning into dust after decomposition. Therefore, we should not waste our time finding meaning of the dream. When we realize the ultimate truth through vipassana insight, we will wake up from the dream, and will find the real meaning of the life at the same time.

May you all have sweet dreams before fully awakened!

"One may conquer in battle
a thousand times a thousand men,

Yet he is the best of conquerors

who conquers himself."

Dhammapada

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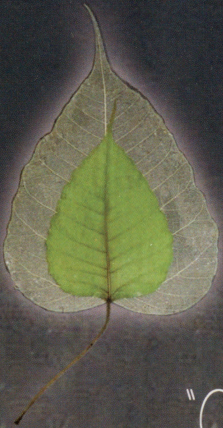

"One may conquer in battle
a thousand times a thousand men,
Yet he is the best of conquerors
who conquers himself"

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